

Background Information:

1. Practicing lockdown drills is in the spirit of 'Being prepared, Not Scared'. When you're dealing with something potentially frightening, if you can get ahead of the anxiety, then kids feel more in control. They feel a sense of competence. They know that the teachers have a plan, and the whole thing can make them feel quite safe. Having a plan in place will help the students feel empowered over the situation knowing there is something they can do. They are helping everyone be safe by staying quiet and following their teacher's directions.
2. You want to be really honest with kids about the low probability that a stranger would come into our school who doesn't belong here, who would want to hurt us. But we want to make sure we have a solid plan.
3. The manner or style in which you communicate this is important. You want to do it in an easy manner, and talk about it with a lot of confidence and competence. Because kids read the tone of voice, the emotion in the presentation.
4. You want to communicate that we're in charge, this is our school, and we want to make sure that only people who belong here are here. Just like we have fire drills, or if there is a snow day we have a plan. If someone who doesn't belong here is in the building, we have a plan to handle it.
5. Practice helps make doing the most useful and safest thing automatic. Something like this may never happen, but when we're practiced in protecting ourselves, then we don't have to worry that we won't know what to do.
6. Also this kind of drill might even present an opportunity to identify kids who might be more anxious than people know. Ask open ended questions about what they're scared about. You want to emphasize the low probability and concrete safety measures that are being taken, that sort of thing.
7. During the lockdown at Sandy Hook Elementary one teacher said she told her students they were waiting for the *good guys* to come and get us. Another teacher said, "*We hid in a closet, we stayed quiet, we held hands, we hugged.*" Hand holding is sometimes referred to as "*borrowed strength*", we gain courage by being in this together. Researchers at the University of Virginia's neuroscience laboratory say that hand holding actually changes the wiring in our brains and makes us feel protected and comforted.
8. Each in her own way protected the children and reassured them that they were loved. *They did them a great service beyond saving their lives.* When the teachers remained calm, they offered the children a model for courage and faith and a different kind of memory of the inherently terrifying situation. If a lockdown goes for an extended period of time, telling students to imagine a place we love to be...your favorite vacation. You don't have to talk about it. Just remember it, everything you loved about it.

Say to the students:

"Every day, we do things to keep ourselves safe. What do you do before walking across the street? It's like wearing a helmet when we ride our bikes. We wear helmets and kneepads when we skateboard. We don't expect to fall, but if we do, we'll be protected. Then we don't have to worry. We can just ride our bikes and boards and not even think about falling, because we have the situation covered. Being prepared is a 'just in case' measure that helps you to feel that you're safe."

"At school, just like if there is a snow day we have a plan. We also have plans at school to keep us safe. We practice fire drills so we know what to do if the fire alarm rings - we leave the school quickly and quietly going to our line up place on the field. In earthquake drills we go under our desks so nothing that falls will hurt us."

*"Another safety plan we have at school is so we know what to do in case someone came in to our school who was so angry or confused they wanted to hurt other people. *This would probably never happen, but just like a fire drill, we can practice our response so we are prepared. Our whole school takes part in these drills so we know we are strong and prepared. We can handle this situation by doing what we practiced.*"*

"Today we are going to have a practice lockdown drill. This is only a practice; no one is really at school who is angry or confused. When Mrs. Ball goes on the intercom.... I will secure your room by Locking all doors (interior and exterior), covering the windows, turning off lights, and tell everyone to get down to be very quiet and get down on the floor away from the windows and door. (Stay out of sight.) It is very important that you be very, very quiet."

Sources:

Information in this document includes quotes from:

- The Child Mind Institute Article *My school's new emergency plan includes lockdown drills. How can we keep them from scaring the kids? Practicing a plan to keep everyone safe can actually make children feel more confident.* Written by Jamie Howard, PhD,
- "Talking to Kids About a Lockdown" written by Judith Simon Prager, PhD from the Huff Post,
- "Talking to Kids about School Lockdown Drills" by Judith Simon Prager, PhD from Hard Talks with kids, and
- my own background knowledge and past experiences in actual lockdowns.

Safety Steps Taken So Far @ FHES:

1. Lowered front office counter and repositioned School Secretary's work station.
2. Reconfigured front entrance so visitors have to enter through the main office where they are directed to sign-in and wear a visitor's lanyard.
3. Put inside locks on every classroom and office door.
4. Outside doors are kept locked during the school day. The exception is the doors at the Eagle Hall so students can use the restroom and get drinks of water during recesses.