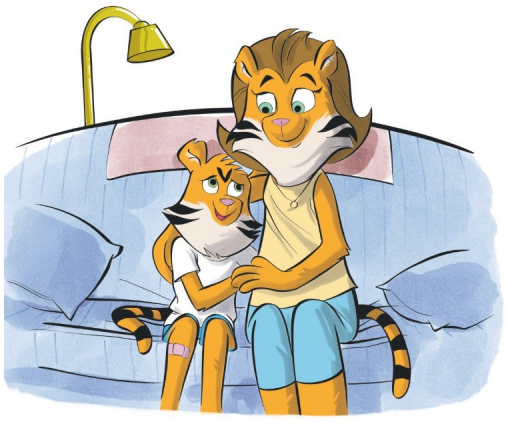
LOCKDOWN DRILL · FOR FAMILIES

Talking to Young Children About Lockdown Drills

Simple, calm words for home, from preschool through first grade.



Lockdown drills are one of the safety practices children may experience at school. Just like fire drills and other emergency drills, they give teachers and children an opportunity to practice what to do so they are prepared if they ever need to use their safety plan.

For young children, how we talk about lockdown drills matters.

Preschool and early elementary children do not need to understand every possible reason a school might use a lockdown. They simply need to know that the adults who care for them have a plan to help keep them safe, and that their job is to listen and follow directions.

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What should I tell my child?

Keep your explanation simple, calm, and honest. You might say:

USE THE WORDS FROM THE BOOK

"Schools have safety plans for lots of different situations. We practice Lockdown Drills to keep us safe if someone or something that doesn't belong is at our school."

YOU CAN REMIND YOUR CHILD

The grown-ups have a plan. Your job is to listen to your teacher.

There is no need to introduce frightening examples or explain situations your child has not asked about. Let your child's questions guide the conversation.

What did my child practice?

In *Lockdown Drill* and during the drill at school, your child practiced four simple safety skills:

1. **Calm bodies**
   Take a deep breath and keep your body still and slow.
2. **Locked lips**
   "Lock" your lips with an invisible key and stay very quiet.
3. **Listening ears**
   Listen to your teacher and follow directions right away.
4. **Together, we are safe**
   Stay with your class in the Special Safety Spot your teacher shows you.

Children do not need to make safety decisions on their own. Their job is simply to listen and follow the directions of the adults caring for them.

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Answer the question they actually asked

Young children sometimes ask questions that sound bigger than they really are. If your child asks, “Could there be something dangerous at my school?” you don’t necessarily need to explain every possible emergency. You can say:

> **“Schools practice for lots of things that probably won’t happen, because practicing helps us know what to do just in case.”**

Then stop and see whether that answered the question. **A good rule is to answer simply, then wait.** If your child wants to know more, they will usually ask.

What if my child asks about “bad guys”?

Children may hear different explanations about lockdown drills from siblings, friends, television, or other adults. If your child asks whether a lockdown is because of a “bad guy,” you can be truthful without providing frightening details:

> **“There are different reasons a school might need everyone to stay safely inside their classrooms. That’s why schools have a plan and practice it.”**

If your child continues asking questions, answer them honestly and simply while bringing the conversation back to the same reassuring message:

> **There are grown-ups whose job is to keep you safe, and they have a plan.**

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What about the snakes in *Lockdown Drill*?

In *Lockdown Drill*, snakes are used as a child-friendly way to help explain why something that doesn't belong at school could mean everyone needs to stay safely inside.

Yes, snakes are real! But the story does not mean there are snakes at your child's school, or that snakes are the reason schools practice lockdown drills.

YOU CAN TELL YOUR CHILD

"The snakes are part of Volcano's story. Your school practices Lockdown Drills to keep you safe if someone or something that doesn't belong is at your school."

What if my child seems worried?

Start by listening. You don't need to immediately explain more or convince your child not to be afraid. Ask what they are thinking about. You might say:

"What part are you wondering about?"

"What did you think about the drill?"

Their answer can help you understand what is actually worrying them. Then return to the simple message:

"You practiced so you would know what to do. Your teachers have a plan to help keep you safe."

Children may also process new experiences through play, drawing, storytelling, or asking the same question several times. This can be a normal way for young children to make sense of something new.

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Little questions kids ask

Young children's questions are often small and practical. Here are some you may hear, with simple answers you can borrow:

"What if I'm in the bathroom or at recess when it happens?"

"Any grown-up at school will help you. Listen to the closest teacher and do what they say."

"What if I have to sneeze, cough or go potty during the drill?"

"That's okay! Your body does those things sometimes. Just do your best to stay calm and quiet, and your teacher will help you."

"How do I know if it's practice or real?"

"You don't have to know. You do the same thing every time. That's why we practice."

"Where will you be? Will you come get me?"

"I'll be right where I always am, and I'll see you at pickup like always. While you're at school, your teachers take care of you."

"Why did the lights go off and the door get locked?"

"That's part of the plan, just like walking outside is part of a fire drill."

"Why do I have to be so quiet?"

"So everyone can hear the teacher's directions. Quiet helps the plan work."

"Do grown-ups get scared?"

"Sometimes! Practicing helps grown-ups feel ready too."

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A few tips for grown-ups

1. **Your calm is contagious.**
Young children read your tone and face more than your words. If you feel uneasy yourself, it's okay to take a minute before you talk.

2. **Skip "nothing bad will ever happen."**
Instead, try: "Lots of grown-ups work hard to keep you safe." It's honest and still reassuring.

3. **Turn off the news.**
If something frightening is in the news, keep it off around young children, and listen for what they may have heard from older siblings or friends.

4. **Plan ahead for extra needs.**
If your child has anxiety, sensory sensitivities, autism, or trouble staying still, talk with the teacher ahead of time about how the drill will work for them.

5. **Read the book before the drill, too.**
Ask your child's teacher when drills happen, and read *Lockdown Drill* together the night before.

When to check in

If your child's worry about the drill continues, interferes with school or sleep, or seems unusually intense, consider checking in with your child's teacher or another trusted professional.



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Keep safety practice simple

You do not need to practice lockdown drills at home. Instead, reinforce the skills that help children during all kinds of emergencies:

- ✓ Listening carefully to trusted adults
- ✓ Following directions the first time
- ✓ Staying with their group
- ✓ Knowing the full name of their parent or caregiver
- ✓ Knowing that adults have plans for emergencies

The goal isn't for young children to understand everything that could go wrong. **The goal is for them to feel confident about what they can do right.**

ONE MESSAGE TO REMEMBER

If your child remembers only one thing after a lockdown drill, let it be this:

"The grown-ups have a safety plan. I can help by listening and following directions."



Lockdown Drill: A Crouching Tigers Safety Story was created to help preschool through first-grade children learn about lockdown drills through simple language, story, and age-appropriate safety practice.

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