

A Pediatrician's Guide for Parents

Talking to Children About School Shooter Drills

Start the Conversation



Open the conversation by asking what thoughts or worries they have, allowing them to guide the conversation and for you to meet them where they are. Reassure them that although drills can be scary, they are part of what schools do to make sure we are all safe.



Emphasize Safety

Explain drills are for their protection. Compare to familiar safety measures like fire drills and seatbelts. Use terms like "lockdown" or "safety drills" instead of "active shooter drills."



Talk About the Plan

Find out when drills happen and what they involve. Go over each step ahead of time so they know what to expect. Review the school's safety policies and family communication plan.

Use a Calm Approach

Stay calm when discussing drills. Your tone sets the emotional context. Avoid graphic details about violence - focus on safety steps and reassurance instead.



A Pediatrician's Guide for Parents

Having Age-Appropriate Conversations

Preschool to Early Elementary



Keep things simple and calm. Use simple language and easy-to-understand facts to explain what is happening. Connect it to things they already know, like locking doors at home or using a car seat. Remind them that planning ahead helps everyone.

“Your school is going to practice a safety drill. You may hear a loud alarm, and your teacher will tell you what to do. Practicing helps everyone know how to stay safe.”

Elementary

Keep the focus on safety rather than scary details. Avoid graphic images or videos. Start sharing the basics of the school's safety plan and explain that these steps are there to protect them.

“During the safety drill, your teacher may ask you to be quiet, move to a certain place, or wait for instructions. These are steps your school practices so everyone knows what to do in an emergency.”



Teenage

Make space for their thoughts and feelings. Talk openly about the larger issues and what can be done to create safer schools. Encourage them to ask questions and share ideas.

“Your school has a safety drill coming up. I'd like to hear what you think about it, whether anything concerns you, and what you believe would help students feel and be safer.”

