



NATIONAL CENTER ON
Early Childhood Health and Wellness

Responding to Potentially Violent Situations



Head Start and child care programs need to know how to prepare for and respond to a variety of emergency situations, including potentially violent ones. Programs should develop and implement a written plan that describes the practices and procedures to use if faced with a threat of violence. [The Emergency Preparedness Manual for Early Childhood Programs](#) has tools and guidance to help programs create or revise plans for responding to these types of emergencies (pp. 13, 17, 20, 22, 29). See *Caring for Our Children* (CFOC) [9.2.4.3: Disaster Planning, Training, and Communication](#) for more information.

Recommended Response Procedure: Lockdown

When faced with a potentially violent situation, both center- and home-based programs should call 911 and

initiate a lockdown. A lockdown is used when there is a perceived danger either inside or outside the facility or building. It includes securing each occupied room by locking and staying away from windows and doors and remaining quiet. Children and staff are required to remain in the room until first responders indicate the emergency is over.

Throughout the emergency, designated staff members should remain in silent communication with first responders and families. An example of silent communication is texting; it allows providers to send and receive messages without talking, which might alert a violent intruder to your location.

The Manual offers lockdown procedure worksheets and checklists for centers (pp. 17, 33) and family child care homes (pp. 20, 36).



Practice, Review, and Revise Your Response

Practice

The first time you activate your response should not be when the emergency is actually happening. Instead, conduct regular practice drills. They can help children and staff become more familiar with emergency procedures, which fosters calm and competent use of the plans in an emergency.

Review

Notify parents when you're planning a drill. Some children can get upset by the practice alone, so it is good to let parents know in advance. After each drill, everyone involved (e.g., the director, providers, teachers, staff, and families) should review how it went. What worked and what could be improved?

Program staff should also discuss the drill with the children so they can ask questions and understand what happened. Brief information that is balanced with reassurance is best when communicating with young children. Simple examples of school safety help to assure children that they are safe. For example, a provider or teacher may tell children that the outside doors are locked.

Revise

Next, program leaders, staff, and families can revise the emergency plan and procedures based on lessons learned during the drill and review process. If there are revisions to the plan, communicate updates to everyone involved, including staff, families, and community partners.

The Emergency Preparedness Manual includes a Practice, Review, Revise worksheet (pp. 38–39) to help programs document drills, review procedures, and revise plans as necessary.

Stay Informed

Please share this tip sheet with colleagues who may be interested in this topic.

Did someone forward you this tip sheet?

Subscribe to updates: <https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/subscribe>

Join Us on MyPeers

Have you experienced a potentially violent situation in your program? How did you handle it? Do you have lessons learned you'd like to share with other providers? Post them in the Health, Safety, and Wellness community on MyPeers.

Select the link to join or login to MyPeers: <https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/about-us/article/mypeers-collaborative-platform-early-care-education-community>