

# ARMED ASSAILANT DRILL CONSIDERATIONS

While an armed assailant on school property is very rare, schools are increasingly being required to consider how to best prepare for and respond to these events. While these drills have the potential to empower staff members and save lives, they can cause harm if not appropriately implemented. This document provides a quick reference of key reminders for schools considering armed assailant drills. At present, there is no empirical research supporting the benefits of school-based armed assailant drills involving a sensorial experience. More detailed guidance is available in the source document "Best Practice Considerations for Armed Assailant Drills in Schools," found at [www.nasponline.org/armed-assailant-drills](http://www.nasponline.org/armed-assailant-drills).

## START BY CREATING A MULTIDISCIPLINARY SAFETY TEAM

- Include school-employed mental health professionals at all levels of drill discussion.
- Conduct a needs assessment to determine threat vulnerabilities. Allocate resources and actions to most probable risks first.
- Plan all safety drills and exercises within a hierarchy of options. Start with lower intensity, discussion-based approaches first (e.g., table-top exercises).
- Consider full-scale exercises only as needed and based on carefully considered data (full-scale exercises with elementary grade students are not recommended).
- While legally required in some states, laws do not specify active assailant/shooter and lockdown drills must be conducted in a highly sensorial manner.
- Be aware of lawsuits surrounding armed assailant drills. Some participants, including adults, have experienced psychological or physical harm due to unannounced drills or highly sensorial physical experiences mimicking an actual event.

## IF CONSIDERING ARMED ASSAILANT DRILLS...

### INCLUDE:

- Emphasis on regular practice with nonsensorial lockdown drills and evacuation drills as the primary foundation for response.
- Consideration of participant trauma histories as well as how cognitive, emotional, and physical abilities may influence physical or psychological safety.
- Reminders to the staff to project composure during all drills/exercises, as student threat perceptions are often based on adult cues. This is especially important with younger children.
- An advanced public announcement of date and time, as well as opt-out procedures, are vital and strongly advised when highly sensorial drills are being planned (i.e., use of actors, props, etc.).

### AVOID:

- A mandatory participation requirement (provide alternative safety training options).
- Highly sensorial experiences that simulate real experiences (participation is discouraged for all students but especially at the preschool and elementary levels).
- Teaching/implying students should ever be "heroes" in crisis situations (e.g., fight back, defend, or counter an intruder).
- Physical contact or use of simulated weapons (e.g., rubber bullets) with drill participants.
- Including participants with histories of exposure to extreme traumatic stressors or a history of exposure to similar events.