MITIGATING NEGATIVE PSYCHOLOGICAL EFFECTS OF SCHOOL LOCKDOWNS

Lockdowns are an important part of school safety and crisis preparedness. Designed to protect students and adults from danger in and around a school, lockdowns are intended to secure a school to keep out a threat. Lockdowns can be triggered because of an intruder, police action in the neighborhood, online threats, or other dangers. Lockdowns can save lives and are considered best practice in crisis response. However, they can produce anxiety, stress, and traumatic reactions in students or staff if not conducted appropriately. Following best practices and attending to the psychological well-being of students and staff can help minimize the potential for unintended harm.

TWO TYPES OF LOCKDOWNS

Secured Perimeter/Lockout
Lock classroom and exterior doors; no one enters or leaves the building, but teachers continue with instruction. Though this can unnerve children and adults, it is less disruptive and stressful than the full-scale lockdown.

Full-Scale Lockdown
Lock/barricade doors, close blinds, cover windows, turn out lights, be silent, and make rooms seem unoccupied. This is used when there is imminent danger to the school, is highly impactful, and can result in stress and traumatic reactions.

BEFORE A LOCKDOWN

- Plan for lockdowns as part of comprehensive emergency preparedness.
- Include a multidisciplinary team of administrators, school-employed mental health professionals, school resource and police officers, and safety and crisis team members to develop a response protocol.
- Work with local law enforcement to plan different lockdown processes for emergencies (i.e., heightened alert versus immediate threat).
- Consider age and developmental levels, individual trauma history, disabilities that might impede mobility or ability to follow instructions, and sensory disabilities that might heighten a distress reaction.
- Plan for native language and cultural considerations in communicating with families and students.
- Provide training to increase knowledge and skills as a part of yearly crisis preparation.
- Carefully plan and conduct regular lockdown drills and announce them beforehand.
- Avoid highly sensorial drills and recognize that drills that are not conducted appropriately may cause physical and psychological harm to students and staff and disrupt the overall learning environment.
- See the companion guide “Armed Assailant Drill Considerations.”
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**MITIGATING NEGATIVE PSYCHOLOGICAL EFFECTS OF SCHOOL LOCKDOWNS**

Provide timely, clear, and direct information to students and staff members.

Communicate clearly and quickly with families.

Monitor social media.

Model a controlled response to inspire calm and confidence.

Use developmentally appropriate language and focus on following adult directions.

Reassure distressed students through techniques such as stabilization and grounding.

Communicate clearly whether there is imminent danger to the school. The perception of an unsafe or risky situation can have a very real effect on students and staff.

Use the secured perimeter/lockout whenever it is safe to do so.

Employ full-scale lockdowns only when the danger to the school is imminent.

**DURING A LOCKDOWN**

- Provide timely, clear, and direct information to students and staff members.
- Communicate clearly and quickly with families.
- Monitor social media.
- Model a controlled response to inspire calm and confidence.
- Use developmentally appropriate language and focus on following adult directions.
- Reassure distressed students through techniques such as stabilization and grounding.
- Communicate clearly whether there is imminent danger to the school. The perception of an unsafe or risky situation can have a very real effect on students and staff.
- Use the secured perimeter/lockout whenever it is safe to do so.
- Employ full-scale lockdowns only when the danger to the school is imminent.

**SUPPORTING STUDENTS FOLLOWING A LOCKDOWN**

- Students may experience anxiety or fear following a lockdown.
- Make time to talk about their feelings and reactions, letting their questions be your guide.
- Provide opportunities for writing, playing music, drawing, looking at books, or imaginative play to help them express their feelings.
- Review safety procedures. Help children identify at least one adult at school and in the community to whom they can go if they feel at risk.
- Keep a regular schedule, including adequate sleep, regular meals, and exercise to promote good physical and emotional health.
- Changes in behavior, appetite, and sleep patterns can signal anxiety or discomfort. In most children, these symptoms will ease with reassurance and time.
- Seek the help of mental health professionals if you are at all concerned.

**AFTER A LOCKDOWN**

- Communicate quickly with parents, neighboring schools, and the media.
- Use student–caregiver reunification procedures.
- Coordinate with law enforcement to determine continued risk and follow-up steps.
- Provide parents and primary caregivers with guidance on how to talk with their children about concerns or fears.
- Recognize trauma reactions and offer mental health crisis intervention assistance.
- Remember that emotional or physical reactions can be delayed following a highly intense event.
- Evaluate the lockdown as soon as feasible, providing an opportunity for students and staff members to share their reactions.