

Talking to Your Child About Safety

Grades 3 - 5

Talking to your child about new safety drills at school is important and necessary. Below are general tips for talking to students in grades 3 - 5.

- Practice what you plan to say ahead of time.
- After giving a brief explanation of safety, let your child take the lead. Ask your child what questions he or she has and provide simple, direct answers that address their questions. Letting school-age children guide the conversation allows them to be in charge of what and how much they want to hear.
- If your child shows concern, help him or her to identify/name their feelings, let them know it is okay to feel scared or worried, and weave in positive or hopeful messages (e.g., "You are feeling scared or worried. That is normal and makes sense. It is okay to feel that way. Your teachers and I are here to keep you safe and you can talk to us anytime if you feel scared.")
- Be sure to communicate to your child that most people are good or caring and that school is generally a safe place. Reinforce the need for your child to listen and follow instructions from trusted adults during emergencies.
- During safety-related discussions, your child may ask you difficult questions. Recognize that when children ask tough questions such as, "Could a shooting happen at my school?" they are often wanting to know if they are safe. In these instances, it is a good idea to talk about how these events are very rare, that there are many people in the child's life who are working to keep him or her safe, and that there are many more good people in the world than there are bad.
- Create a safety plan together as a family and review it regularly.

Examples of How to Introduce School Shooting Drills

Your teacher told me that you are going to start doing "safety" drills or lessons at school. That means you and your class are going to start practicing how to stay safe if there is an emergency at school. You may be learning things like how to run or hide. Emergencies or other scary things don't happen a lot, but you need to practice these exercises or drills so that you know what to do if one does happen. The most important thing to know is that your teachers, helpers, and other grown-ups in charge are there to keep you safe at school. If something scary happens at school, you need to listen to them and do what they say right away.

Resources Regarding Personal Safety:

My Body Belongs to Me
by Jill Starishevsky

I Can Play It Safe
by Alison Feigh

Be Aware: My Tips for Personal Safety
by Gina Bellisario

Protecting the Gift: Keeping Children and Teenagers Safe
by Gavin DeBecker



When using a sensitive, developmentally-appropriate approach to discussing safety with your child, it is unlikely that he or she will exhibit signs of distress. However, should you observe the following symptoms in your child, consider talking to your pediatrician or mental health provider:

- Changes in behavior, such as increased irritability, anger, crying, or worry
- Regression in previously mastered skills, including toileting, sleeping, or self-care difficulties or excessive clinginess toward parents or teachers
- Refusal to go to school
- Trouble concentrating or paying attention
- Increased physical complaints (e.g., headaches, stomachaches)

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