

The Mental Impact of Lockdown Drills on Early Childhood Students

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Abstract

The most common drill was evacuation also known as fire drills. Fire drills were designed to prepare students, teachers and other people in the school to leave school property as quickly as possible in case of an actual fire and find safety outside the building. Lockdown drills were not a common practice in New York schools until 2016. During a lockdown drill students have to clear the hallways and go to the nearest classroom where they can hide and stay as quiet as they can. Teachers make sure each student is not visible, lock all doors, turn off the lights and barricade the doors if possible. Teachers need to be properly trained to handle a child's behavior during a time of crisis but most importantly know how to help a child cope during a stressful time and let them know they are safe. Most children will understand that it is school routine and that it is mandated to practice lockdown drills, but other children can become frightened, traumatized or even suffer an anxiety attack because either they have heard about school shootings on television and the fatal casualties or had a personal experience or even have minimal knowledge of gun control. Children should feel safe coming to a school building knowing they're safe and that they will have a normal school day and at the end of the day they will be back home with their loved ones.

The Mental Impact of Lockdown Drills on Early Childhood Students

Lockdown drills were enforced in New York City and went into effect 2016. A school lockdown drill is meant to prepare teachers, students and any other staff personnel to find a secure place, to make sure no one is left behind, and for hallways to remain clear and quiet until a safety signal is given. Due to school shootings increasing NYC public schools are now mandated to perform four practice lockdown drills in case of a threat or

if there's an active shooter near school property. Lockdown drills are likely to occur at different times, different settings during the school day so everybody is well prepared in case an active shooter is present. The drills are usually designed by law enforcement, police officers visit the school and give their insight and point out possible blind spots that were not spotted by school personnel to have a successful lockdown and avoid any fatalities.

Since a lockdown drill can occur at any time during the school day students avoid drinks throughout the school day to stay as far away from the restroom some students avoid leaving the classroom in general, so they do not find themselves in the hallways alone without any adult supervision. According to Erbacher and Poland (2019) school psychologists should be involved in the lockdown drill planning and be available for any student that found themselves having a hard time during the lockdown. Some parents reported their child were locking their doors while they were home, some children were not able to sleep because they have reoccurring nightmares of a school shooting.

Statement of the Problem

Parents are reporting that their child is showing signs of trauma due to the lockdown drills and panic that there could be a possible shooting in their school. Children are frightened while participating in a school safety procedure, having to stop what they are doing to hide and avoid being spotted, remaining quiet without knowing what is happening outside the classroom is scary to them. Teachers should reassure their students that this is a mandatory drill, they are safe and to not panic. Family members should feel secure when they drop off their children at their school and to know that their children are safe.

In the past 10 years there has been 180 school shootings in the United States of America, 114 were killed and 242 were injured. Suburban areas have been impacted the most and have suffered major fatalities. Children should be able to go to school without worrying someone is going to show up and go on a killing spree. School shootings have increased tremendously and have caused parents to doubt their child's safety, but they should be reassured that during these lockdowns certain protocols are followed. Students are directed to the safest part of the classroom, away from the windows and doors, to the interior walls. The doors are closed and locked, the window shades are pulled down to prevent an outsider from looking inside. Gun violence has increased, it has become easier to purchase a firearm and it has become accessible in certain states. The House of Representatives need to enforce their gun control laws and enforce background checks for all gun buyers. The House of Representatives makes and passes federal laws, if they enforce gun laws it would become merely impossible for someone to purchase a firearm and it would help prevent mass shootings.

Research

Research shows that children are more vulnerable, and that childhood trauma can affect their physiological system that handles stress and anxiety. If the drills are conducted correctly, it can increase awareness on how to properly respond without increasing anxiety or making the children feel less safe. Although lockdown drills were not commonly practiced until recent years due to the increase of school shootings, they have become essential in our present time. Teachers and school staff should be properly trained and be ready for the worst. Though it could be stressful and a difficult situation for everybody, it is very important for teachers to be able to help not only help

themselves, but their students as well. Teachers should attend lockdown training sessions to learn techniques that can ease students during a difficult crisis

Article 1

The lack of knowledge teachers has during a lockdown drill demonstrates how they need proper training to create a safe environment for the children and for themselves. Teachers find themselves being worried if they have secured every place in their classroom and if their students are safe during these drills. Madeline Will herself writes, "For many teachers, the realization sets in during these drills that 'if the door opens, they're coming for me and my kids,' ...my responsibility is the kids and to keep them safe, and if I don't get that door closed tight enough, they're coming for me." (Will, 2018) Teachers should not panic because if their students notice that they are not handling the situation professionally they would not feel safe and either panic or start to cry. During lockdown drills you have to stay as quiet as you can to avoid being heard.

Will informs about the impact school shootings can have on not only on the children but the teachers as well. Students have post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) when they survived a school shooting and go back to school. Some teachers turn their classrooms to makeshift weapons if they find themselves in the position where the intruder is in the classroom. Only the teachers know their own advantages in the classroom, they would sacrifice themselves to keep the children safe. Will touches base on the Parkland shooting and how it impacted every teacher, the drills are taken seriously not because they are mandated but because they happen across America. Will also mentioned a teacher Phillip Brettschneider, who was only in 4th grade and heard about the Columbine school shooting, Brettschneider was living in Wisconsin and was severely

impacted by the incident he went to therapy because he too afraid to go back to school.

Not only children are impacted from school lockdown drills but teachers as well because they never know what can happen throughout the school day and if they are going to risk their lives to save a child's life.

Article 2

Children may seem naïve, and they might not understand what a lockdown drill is or why they even occur four times throughout the school year, but they can recognize when something is not right. They are innocent children and may not know the sad tragedies that can occur at any given time. Sally Campbell Galman gives a vivid description in her poem of how a teacher reacted when a lockdown was occurring. Her main focus was getting the children into a secure location, the bathroom. The teacher remained calm even though she was scared herself.

Galman was a participant observer in rural New-England preschool classroom, she was observing children's pretend play. During her time in the preschool there was a shooting in a nearby school, the school she was in proceeded to do a lockdown drill. From the perspective of little girl in pre-k, Galman proceeds to describe how even though the teacher did not demonstrate fear the children were quick to observe there was something wrong. In her poem, *Mouse Nest*, Galman (Galman 2018) writes "Nick begins to cry. Teacher says, Oh my babies, oh my sweet ones, please be quiet— Not a breath not a sound... Let's pretend, she whispers, that we are baby mice in a nest, silent and safe. Then I see the light change just under the door. It is the cat." Instead of the teacher panicking she focuses on her student's safety and comes up with the idea to pretend they are mice. Being in minor control of a situation that is out of your hands can help you feel

secure about yourself and it gives the students the reassurance they need. The children forget about what is happening and focus on the game. Instead of panicking and crying they will demonstrate that they are the best mice they can be. Using pretend play helps children decrease any anxiety attacks and ease their mind.

Article 3

Some states throughout America perform lock down drills but they also reenact what can happen possible happen in a school shooting. These reenactments have left the children traumatized because instead of promoting a well-organized drill, they are implementing fear. Terry Erbacher & Scott Poland (2019) urges schools to involve their school psychologist when they are planning a lockdown drill. Students do not know when a lockdown drill is going to be performed, majority of the time they are caught off guard. Children are required to find a safe spot wherever they are located, remain calm and stay quiet but the fear of not making it back home to be with their loved ones has had a traumatic impact on them.

Erbacher & Poland mandate for school staff to not only think about a child's physical well-being but their mental-being as well. Some students may have trauma caused by previous life situations and full-scale lockdown drills may be frightening to them. Erbacher & Poland (2018) proceed to inform us "On December 6, a Florida school initiated a lockdown saying, 'This is not a drill.' Students sobbed, vomited, and fainted... It was a drill, and the resultant trauma was unnecessary" not being well prepared even if it is a drill student will proceed to panic and their mind will be their weakest links. Children undergo the lockdown drill knowing someone is not shooting at their peers but when they are aware it is not a drill, and it is actually happening their urge to flee the

scene is high and can cause a fatality. Psychologists should be able to partake in the lockdown drills and be available for students who found themselves having a hard time. Even though lockdown drills are performed for a child's safety it is important for them to not only feel safe in a school building but also know that an adult is willing to listen and help them find ways to cope if they ever find themselves in a crisis.

Small Advocacy Action

Lockdown drills should be taken seriously. We live in a country where there have been far too many school shootings, too many fatalities. Parents and teachers should come together and discuss what lockdown drills are and why they are being performed four times throughout their child's academic school year. Teachers and parents should meet days before a lockdown drill is performed to discuss what happens and the safety requirements that are practiced. During these meetings, parents can ask questions or give their own perspective towards how the lockdown drills are being performed and further discuss any traumas their child has. Teachers should not be blind-sided and be ready to deal their students accordingly. Keeping children safe from an active shooter is a great reasonability. Maintaining not only yourself but the children safe is something every teacher should do. Families should know that the children are in great hands and that the teachers are well trained. It is Important to reassure the parents that not only the teachers but every school staff personnel have attended training sessions and are certified to handle children who might undergo an anxiety attack.

Large Advocacy Action

Teachers and parents should come together and contact elected officials to enforce gun control. Firearms should not be easily accessible, there should be enforced

background checks to anyone that purchases a firearm. The House of Representatives are responsible for passing laws and many believe they are the founding base to securing a safe environment for children.

Teachers, school staff and students should not be thinking to themselves thinking if today the day is there is going to be an active shooting. They should not walk into a building that is supposed to be secured, full of learning and have the fear something tragic may happened. Teachers give students the reassurance they need, they are safe, and everything is under control. Parent should feel at ease when they drop off their children to school, children should only be worried about what gym activity they are going to do today, what's for lunch.

Commentary

Lockdown drills was not common while I was growing up. My first lockdown drill was in high school, I was around 16 years old, and I was not prepared, I assumed it was a regular fire drill, when I noticed my algebra teacher get up and lock the door and told us to get up and hide. I was frightened. Lockdown drills are becoming something normal for the young children. My brothers were in elementary school when they found themselves hiding in the closet because their school received threats of a possible shooting. My brothers were 8 and 10 years old, hiding for approximately 2 hours. As a future early childhood educator I do not want children going to school being afraid that they might find themselves in an active shooting. Children deserve to live normal lives and not be worried about not making it back home to be with their loved ones. Teachers should not turn their classrooms into makeshifts, in case the perpetrator makes it inside

the classroom and the teacher finds themselves having to risk their lives to keep the children safe.

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