

Timeless School Safety Strategies for Emergency Management

Ensuring the safety and security of students and staff is paramount in any educational environment. Implementing effective emergency management strategies not only prepares schools for unforeseen events but also fosters a sense of reassurance within the community. By focusing on ten timeless school safety strategies, institutions can establish comprehensive frameworks that prioritize prevention, preparedness, response, and recovery. These strategies encompass a range of measures from proactive planning and regular drills to leveraging technology and fostering strong partnerships with local authorities. By integrating these strategies into daily operations, schools can create safer environments where learning can thrive even in the face of emergencies.

1. Partner with your local first responder agencies.

Building relationships with local first responders is essential when developing emergency operation plans. Planning, training, conducting drills, and overseeing after-action meetings can enhance response times and coordination during emergencies. Local first responders can include law enforcement, emergency management, 911 center, fire, emergency medical service (EMS) personnel, public works employees, and local health care workers such as health department and local emergency department. Some ways to develop partnerships with first responders are:

- Invite first responders to participate with the district and school planning ([T.C.A. § 49-6-806](#)). [Tabletop Exercises](#) are a great way to plan, practice, and collaborate with first responders and community services.
- Have first responders participate in emergency drills ([T.C.A. § 49-6-807](#))
- Ensure that district/school safety teams and first responders collaborate in [after-action meetings](#) to discuss strengths, challenges, and needs for improvement
- Ask law enforcement and first responders to conduct random walk-throughs at your schools or be involved in school activities and celebrations (i.e., career day, sports events, etc.)
- Keep open communication with your first responders. Tennessee's [Handle With Care Program](#) is available to assist with that collaboration.

2. Focus on "all hazards" emergency planning in all places.

"All hazards" emergency planning refers to a comprehensive approach that prepares schools and districts to respond effectively to a wide range of emergencies or disasters, regardless of their cause or nature. Here are key aspects of focusing on "all hazards" emergency planning in various settings:

- **Identify Potential Risks:** Assess the [specific risks and threats](#) that could affect your institution, such as natural disasters (earthquakes, floods), accidents (fires, chemical spills), or human-caused incidents (intruders, violence).
- **Develop Emergency Plans:** Create [comprehensive emergency response plans](#) tailored to each type of threat identified. Ensure [these plans](#) include evacuation procedures, communication protocols, and roles/responsibilities of staff during emergencies.

- **Collaboration with Emergency Services:** Establish partnerships and communication channels with local emergency responders (fire department, police) to facilitate coordination and support during emergencies. Conduct joint training exercises to enhance collaboration.
- **Support for Vulnerable Populations:** [Consider the needs](#) of students with disabilities, medical conditions, or language barriers in emergency planning. [Develop protocols](#) to ensure their safety and [provide appropriate support](#) during emergencies.
- **Community Engagement:** Involve parents, guardians, and the broader school community in emergency preparedness efforts. Provide [resources and guidance](#) on how families can prepare and support school emergency plans.
- **Plan for emergencies that may not occur during school hours:** These events may include after-school programs, special events, parent-teacher conferences, [athletic events](#), [summer school](#), parent meetings, and other events.

By focusing on "all hazards" emergency planning, schools can create a safer environment for learning and ensure effective response and recovery measures are in place for any type of emergency that may arise. This comprehensive approach helps mitigate risks, protect lives, and support the continuity of education and operations during crises.

3. **Conduct Security Assessments** According to [Tenn. Code Ann. § 49-6-4302](#), each Tennessee public school is required to conduct a school security assessment using the assessment tool developed by the TN Department of Homeland Security (TDOHS). The assessment identifies potential vulnerabilities and suggests options that may eliminate or reduce those vulnerabilities. While the intent of a school security assessment is that risk will be reduced and the safety of persons and property will be increased, there is no guarantee that all vulnerabilities will be identified or that the facility evaluated will be free from risk. The security assessment should:
 - Have two assessors: one person from the school and the local law enforcement agency that are trained in the fundamentals of [Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design](#) and physical security
 - Assessments are to be completed annually
 - Assessments must inspect the property, the building, all systems, and all policies and procedures

For further information contact Homeland.Security@tn.gov.

4. **Improve overall visitor management strategies.**

Visitor management in schools is crucial for ensuring the safety and security of students, staff, and the overall school environment. Here are some effective strategies:

- **Implement a Visitor Check-in System:** Utilize a digital visitor management system that requires all visitors to check in upon arrival. This system can include scanning a government-issued ID, printing visitor badges with their name and photo, and logging their entry and exit times.
- **Establish Clear Procedures:** Develop and communicate clear protocols for visitors, including where they should enter the building, who they should see upon arrival, and how they should check in. This clarity helps streamline the process and ensures consistency.

- **Require Identification:** Request all visitors to provide a valid ID when checking in. This helps verify their identity and ensures they are authorized to be on school premises.
- **Screen Visitors:** Consider implementing a basic background check for certain types of visitors, such as volunteers or guest speakers who will have direct contact with students.
- **Monitor Entry Points:** Limit access points to the school building and ensure that each entry point is monitored, either by staff or through surveillance cameras. Unauthorized entry should be prevented through locked doors and restricted access.
- **Train Staff and Students:** Educate school staff, students, and parents/guardians about the visitor management procedures and the importance of adhering to them. Encourage students to report any unfamiliar individuals to school personnel. [SafeTN](#) is a free, secure, and open-door communications platform where you can send in tips and access useful resources to help keep your school and community safe. |
- **Emergency Preparedness:** Include visitor management protocols in the school's emergency preparedness plan. Ensure that staff are trained on responding to different scenarios involving visitors, including lockdown procedures if necessary.
- **Visitor Escort Policies:** Implement policies requiring visitors to be escorted while on school grounds, particularly in areas where students are present.
- **Collaborate with Law Enforcement:** Establish a partnership with local law enforcement to conduct periodic security assessments and drills related to visitor management.
- By implementing these strategies, schools can create a safer environment for everyone while still allowing necessary access for authorized visitors.

5. Revisit EOPs and procedures.

Revisiting [district](#) and [school](#) Emergency Operations Plans (EOPs) and procedures is crucial for maintaining preparedness and ensuring the safety of students, staff, and visitors in case of emergencies. Here are some key steps and considerations when revisiting school EOPs and procedures:

- **Review Current EOP:** Start by reviewing the existing Emergency Operations Plan. This includes [examining procedures](#) for various types of emergencies such as fire, severe weather, medical emergencies, lockdowns, and evacuations. These should be updated yearly.
- **Identify Stakeholders:** Identify key stakeholders who should be involved in the review process. This typically includes school administrators, teachers, support staff, local law enforcement, emergency responders, and parents or community members.
- **Update Contact Information:** Ensure that all contact information for key personnel, emergency services, and relevant stakeholders is current and accurate.
- **Evaluate Response Procedures:** Evaluate the effectiveness of current response procedures. Consider scenarios where improvements could be made based on past incidents, near misses, or lessons learned from other schools. [Tabletop Exercises](#) are a great way to train, practice, re-evaluate, and make adjustments to emergency plans and procedures with all stakeholders.

- **Communication Plans:** Develop or update communication plans for notifying students, staff, parents, and the community during emergencies. Consider multiple communication methods such as text messages, phone calls, emails, social media, and public address systems.
- **Resource Assessment:** Review available resources such as emergency supplies, [go-kits](#), communication devices, and evacuation routes. Make sure they are adequate and accessible.
- **Collaboration with Authorities:** Coordinate with local law enforcement, fire departments, emergency medical services, and other relevant authorities to align school EOPs with community response plans. Provide all necessary documentation to the appropriate community supports.
- **Legal and Compliance Considerations:** Ensure that the revised EOPs comply with local, state, and federal laws and regulations related to school safety and emergency preparedness. Contact your school district's attorney for legal compliance and questions.
- By systematically reviewing and updating school EOPs and procedures, educational institutions can enhance their ability to respond effectively to emergencies and prioritize the safety and well-being of everyone on campus.

6. Conduct trainings for all faculty and staff.

Conducting emergency preparedness, safety, and security-related trainings for all faculty and staff is crucial to ensure a safe and organized response during critical situations. A structured approach to implement these trainings effectively are to:

- **Emergency Procedures:** Train staff on specific procedures to follow during different types of emergencies, including evacuation routes, assembly points, and methods for accounting for all individuals.
- **Safety Protocols:** Educate faculty and staff on safety protocols related to hazardous materials, equipment, and procedures.
- **Security Measures:** Teach security measures such as recognizing suspicious behavior, controlling access to buildings, and responding to threats.
- **Regular Training Sessions:** Schedule regular training sessions at least annually or whenever there are significant updates to emergency plans or protocols.
- **Refresher Courses:** Offer refresher courses to ensure that staff remain familiar with procedures and any changes in emergency protocols.
- **Continuous Learning:** Stay updated on best practices and evolving threats in emergency preparedness to continuously improve training programs. Ensure all stakeholders are trained in emergency procedures for your district and schools. Some available trainings that one may consider are through [FEMA](#), [REMS](#), [COPS training portal](#), and [TEMA](#).

By following these steps, you can ensure that all faculty and staff are well-prepared to respond effectively to emergencies, enhancing overall safety and security within your institution.

7. Improve how you conduct drills ([T.C.A. § 49-6-807](#)).

Improving how [drills](#) are conducted in schools is crucial for ensuring safety and preparedness. Here are several ways to enhance drill procedures:

- **Clear Communication and Planning:** Ensure that [drill procedures](#) are well-documented and communicated to all staff and students beforehand. This includes outlining objectives, roles, and expected behaviors during drills.
- **Regular Practice:** Conduct drills regularly throughout the school year, including different scenarios such as fire drills, lockdown drills, and severe weather drills. This familiarity increases confidence and readiness during real emergencies.
- **Realistic Scenarios:** Introduce realistic elements into drills where possible. For example, vary the timing and locations of drills to simulate unpredictability. This helps participants to be prepared for different situations.
- **Feedback and Evaluation:** After each drill, gather feedback from participants, teachers, and staff. Use this feedback to identify areas for improvement and adjust procedures accordingly.
- **Incorporate Technology:** Utilize technology to enhance drills, such as using intercom systems for announcements, digital displays for instructions, or automated alerts for quick dissemination of information.
- **Specialized Training:** Provide specialized training for staff members who have specific roles during emergencies, such as first aid response, evacuation coordination, or communication management.
- **Review and Update Policies:** Regularly review and update emergency policies and procedures based on evolving threats, feedback from drills, and changes in school layout or student population.

By implementing these strategies, schools can enhance the effectiveness of their drill procedures, better preparing staff and students to respond calmly and effectively during emergencies.

8. Establish a behavioral threat assessment and management team and have student reporting methods

Establishing a [behavioral threat assessment](#) ([T.C.A. § 49-6-2701](#)) and management team and implementing student reporting methods are crucial steps in maintaining safety and addressing potential threats in educational settings. A structured approach to achieve this is to:

- Establish a multi-tiered system of supports (MTSS)
- Define prohibited and concerning behaviors
- Create a central reporting mechanism
- Define a threshold for law enforcement intervention
- Establish Threat Assessment Procedures
- Develop Risk Management options
- Create and promote safe school climates
- Conduct training for all stakeholders

By establishing a robust behavioral threat assessment and management team and implementing effective student reporting methods, educational institutions can proactively address potential threats and create a safer environment for all stakeholders.

For more information or to schedule training, contact TOSS TN Care Project careproject@tosstn.com

9. Conduct emergency and safety equipment checks and tests.

Conducting emergency and safety equipment checks and tests in schools is crucial for ensuring the safety of students, staff, and visitors. Here is a systematic approach to conducting these checks:

- **Create a Checklist:** Develop a comprehensive checklist that includes all emergency and safety equipment that needs to be checked regularly. This may include fire extinguishers, smoke detectors, emergency lighting, first aid kits, emergency exits, alarm systems, AEDs, and any other relevant safety equipment.
- **Assign Responsibilities:** Clearly designate who is responsible for conducting these checks. Typically, this responsibility may fall on the facilities management team, safety officers, or designated staff members who are trained in emergency procedures.
- **Establish a Schedule:** Set up a regular schedule for conducting checks. Perform these checks monthly or quarterly, with more intensive inspections annually.
- **Document Inspections:** Keep detailed records of each inspection. Note the date of inspection, the person responsible, findings (including any deficiencies or issues), and actions taken to address them.

10. Create a culture of safety.

[Creating a culture of school safety](#) is crucial for fostering a positive learning environment where students, teachers, and staff feel secure and supported. Here are several strategies to achieve this:

- **Build positive relationships:** Students feel safe with high quality relationships between students and teachers.
- **Establish clear and comprehensive safety policies and procedures:** Communicate to [everyone in the school community](#), including students, parents, teachers, and staff. These should cover areas such as emergency protocols, behavior expectations, and reporting mechanisms.
- **Regular Training and Drills:** Conduct regular training sessions and drills for students and staff on various safety procedures, including fire drills, lockdown drills, and evacuation procedures. Practice helps everyone respond effectively in real emergencies.
- **Physical Security Measures:** Ensure that the school has adequate physical security measures in place, such as locked doors, controlled access points, surveillance cameras, and secure perimeter fencing. Regularly assess and update these measures as needed.
- **Crisis Response Teams:** Form crisis response teams composed of trained staff members who can quickly and effectively respond to emergencies. These teams should have clearly defined roles and responsibilities.
- **Positive School Climate:** [Foster a positive school climate](#) where students feel connected to their peers and adults. Implement programs that promote kindness, respect, and inclusivity to reduce the likelihood of conflicts and bullying.
- **Community Involvement:** Involve parents, local law enforcement, and community members in school safety efforts. Collaboration enhances awareness, support, and resources available to maintain a safe environment.

- **Support Mental Health:** Address the mental health and well-being of students and staff by providing access to counseling services, promoting stress management techniques, and encouraging open communication about mental health issues.
- **Technology Tools:** [Utilize technology](#) to enhance safety, such as mobile apps for reporting concerns anonymously, automated notification systems for emergencies, and monitoring software for online safety.
- **Regular Assessments and Reviews:** Conduct regular assessments and reviews of school safety practices and protocols. Solicit feedback from students, parents, and staff to identify areas for improvement.
- **Educational Programs:** [Integrate safety education](#) into the curriculum to teach students about personal safety, conflict resolution, and responsible online behavior.
- **Responsive Leadership:** Ensure that school leadership is responsive to safety concerns raised by students, parents, or staff members. Promptly investigate and address issues to maintain trust and confidence in the school community.

By implementing these strategies consistently and involving all stakeholders in the process, schools can create a culture of safety that promotes learning, well-being, and overall success for everyone involved.

Prepare Postvention [Prepare Postvention Training Information](#)

Other helpful resources:

1. National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments (NCSSLE) Technical Assistance for Safe and Supportive Learning Environments <https://safesupportivelearning.ed.gov/>
2. I Love U Guys Crisis Response [Home ♥ The "I Love U Guys" Foundation](#)
3. Tennessee Sample Drill Log [drills](#)
4. Tennessee Model District EOP [Model District EOP](#)
5. Tennessee Model School EOP [Model School EOP](#)
6. REMs Guidance Documents for Developing High Quality School EOPs
[Guide for Developing High-Quality School Emergency Operations Plans \(ed.gov\)](#)
7. Guidance on Delayed Fire Alarm
[Delayed Fire Alarm Response](#)
8. NASP Guidelines for Exercises and Drills
[Conducting Crisis Exercises and Drills \(nasponline.org\)](#)
9. School Threat Assessment Toolkit
<https://www.nc2s.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/School-Threat-Assessment-Toolkit-Section-1.pdf>
10. Using a Six-Step Planning Process to Develop Emergency Operations Plans:
<https://rems.ed.gov/Resources/Specific?Topic=EOPDevelopment>
11. REMS School EOP Planning 101: Creating High Quality School Emergency Operations Plans that Address all Threats, Hazards, Settings, and Times: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sdUp4fgqsB0>
12. FEMA G364 Multi-Hazard Emergency Planning for Schools Toolkit:
<https://training.fema.gov/programs/emischool/el361toolkit/coursematerials.htm>
13. FEMA IS-100 Introduction to the Incident Command System:
<https://training.fema.gov/is/courseoverview.aspx?code=IS-100.c&lang=en>

14. FEMA IS-700 Introduction to the National Incident Management System (NIMS)
<https://training.fema.gov/is/courseoverview.aspx?code=IS-700.b&lang=en>
15. Campus Safety Training Program: Introduction to Incident Command System (ICS) for School Personnel: <https://copstrainingportal.org/project/introduction-to-incident-command-system-for-school-personnel/>
16. Forming a School Behavioral Threat Assessment Team
[Behavioral Threat Assessment Team | Webinars | Readiness and Emergency Management for Schools Technical Assistance Center \(ed.gov\)](#)
17. Crisis Intervention: Overview of Effective Models
[2024CITO | COPS Training Portal](#)