

## **Preparing for the Emergency Drill at Home**

Every school has a School Safety Planning Manual. This is a school's plan in the event of an emergency. It is delineated into the types of routes, personnel, roles, and procedure per event. Typically these school safety plans are written up with the intent on having the Special Education staff only caring for children with special needs. The teachers and aides will have the knowledge and practice to coordinate all the details. However, with the upheaval, there may need to be additional components to manage behavior and emotions while encouraging specific actions. Our demeanor, as well as procedures, kits and practices can be improved upon, making this process less traumatic. This can be used for your elementary or high school-aged child.

Typically the school will contact you prior to an emergency drill. This practice is encouraged; however, there will need to be additional preparation done on site for this to be effective. Note that it has been known for some schools to contact you in order to shield your child, asking for specific items to reduce stress or to keep your child home from school; that will not help preparing the child. Let's remove the shielding and truly prepare for an emergency, calmly and confidently.

### **Preparation for preparation**

Sounds, lights, racing heartbeats and commotion are going to happen in an emergency. Our children do not usually enjoy these experiences and their responses can include elopement (running away from the scene), self-injurious behaviors etc. Their response is appropriate because there are frightening environmental events occurring such as the earth moving, strong heat in the building, an active shooter or strong winds. Their instinct is to remove themselves from the situation. Yet, we must also keep them safe. To prepare for an emergency, let's take another step back to assess your environment. Think about where you live, what the potential dangers are, and who you can count on

(AUSM, 2011). Do this for two reasons: 1) it will help you create the emergency kit 2) it will help you complete the National Fragile X Organization's Emergency Card (see reference).

## **Preparing**

With this information in mind, complete the NFXF Emergency Card in legible handwriting. Be sure to also scan a picture of your child on the form (there is space, in the center, on the left side of the first page). Make at least 7 copies and laminate them. Please distribute them accordingly\*:

1. Give one to the primary teacher (if high school: the case manager to determine best location)
2. Give one to the School office (your teacher can provide it to the office)
3. Attach one to the inside of your child's backpack
4. Keep one with you at all times
5. Give one to your emergency contact
6. Give one to the bus personnel transporting your child (if applicable)
7. Place one on the inside of your child's emergency kit

Next, purchase a durable plastic box (no larger than 7"H x 8"W x 11"L) that can be easily grabbed with one hand. Inside place a smaller version of your child's communication device (such as PECS) with icons to be quiet, sit, run etc. If your child struggles with following verbal directions and responds to rewards, include those inside the box. It is to be used ONLY for the real emergency, not during the drill. This might be food. Normally, food is not a reinforcer, however in the event of a real emergency, we do need your child to follow and respond to the directions immediately, including quickly quieting. Also include any of the following: extra glasses, diaper,

socks, aluminum emergency blanket, hand wipes, 3 crayons and paper (or a few Legos etc. *Note: this is not a toy box but some items to entertain when waiting*), water pouch, and copies of their medication prescriptions (this is not to fill the medication, merely to inform emergency personnel). Lastly, include a letter from yourself to your child. This does not need to be a long letter, but enough to convey the message; something that the teacher can read to the child. Inform the child that you will be there as soon as you can, to pick him/her up and take care of him/her. This box can be stored in your child's primary classroom, or if in high school, work with the case manager to determine the best place on campus. It should not be kept in your child's backpack; there is a strong possibility that your child will utilize it in non-emergency situations. When giving the box to the school, ask them for the all the dates of the drills. Typically these are scheduled into the school year and they know what time it will occur.

For the high school aged child, ask for a quick chat with the case manager and classroom teacher to discuss the procedure. This should not be a long meeting. Be clear that the classroom teacher should not shield, such as getting additional support by having more staff added into the class for the drill or having the child called into another class. Consider these drills as opportunities to practice and talk about how to encourage the intended positive behaviors, including the possible negative behaviors with methods on how to resolve them.

Draw out the routes for the school and the home. Use the school's map. You can work with the case manager on this. The school will have a designated drop off location for your child. However, in the event that your child is injured, you should know the intended route to minimize response time if you are needed for support. When drawing the route for your home, specify where your meet up location is, and practice going there (consider incorporating this spot into your drop off and pick up routine).

Consider if you need to write a social story so that it can be used to prepare your child. Attached is a social story for you to consider; though the social story should be modified for your school and your child. A portion of this story is interactive; you will need to record what your child will see and hear. Ask the school to set the alarm off (at a safe time) for no more than 5 seconds. Sometimes they are hesitant to do this, ask then when they will be testing the system and be there at that time. Record this with your video function and audio function on a device. What does the alarm look like in the classroom when it goes off? When reading the social story, this portion can be included at a softer, lighter tone at the appropriate part of the story. Read the story calmly and confidently. You know what to do in an emergency. Share that confidence with your child.

### **Emergency Drill**

When you are notified of the drill, remind the teacher to direct your child to grab their emergency kit and let them know you will read the social story that evening. Do not shield but prepare. Read the social story again, using the sounds and video. If your child is preoccupied, read it out loud near your child while your child is playing. Again, read calmly and confidently.

The day of the drill, you should talk about the emergency drill with another adult, within ear shot of your child. Discuss the behavior you expect, discuss the reason for the drill, and discuss the preparation activities you have already completed. Then as you take your child to class, you can talk with them about the drill.

During the drill, the teacher should go through the procedure of the drill. Marin County developed a good procedure for the school's role and it is listed in the references. If your child refuses due to the sounds, the transition or the experience, it is ok. If your child struggles, that too can be worked on, but staying a part of the process should be seen as a success. These are not easy

situations, but if your child follows directives that is great! Ask your teacher to come in and practice the drill during lunch or another time.

### **After-drill**

After the drill, there should be a discussion of the routine the class practiced and a return to the schedule as quickly as possible. If items were used from the kit, be sure they are quickly refilled.

As you go through your day to day life, point out emergency exits, consider practicing an emergency drill in the home, at their after school group, and/or read the social story on a non-school night. Visits to the neighborhood fire house and dropping off bagels as a family outing is always encouraged. The small things you do to generate community should pay off well in the future for your child, you and the community.

An emergency is worse when we are not prepared. Taking full opportunity of these emergency drills should alleviate a bit of the future stressors. There are several websites that discuss different facets of preparation, some are referenced below. They may shed additional insight into a solid plan. With your calm and confident demeanor and prepared procedures, you are manifesting the intent: reducing trauma during a traumatic experience.

*\*Some groups suggest leaving a copy at the Fire station, please don't. It is better if you find out if they can register your child in their system. They will not check their files during an emergency but will reference the system. Some counties have this system.*

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Appendix:

### Emergency Drill Social Story

Sometimes the place we are in becomes unsafe. When this happens, a loud noise and lights will be my signal to stop my work. Find an adult and line up at the door. I can breathe calmly as I wait in line. I will walk with my teacher to our spot on the grass. I can sit on the grass or stand in line. When my teacher says, "All Clear," I can walk back to the classroom in the line and return to my seat.

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