



Podcast #4 Transcript: Practice with Sensitivity

Welcome to the final Y4Y podcast in the series on safety planning and practices. My name is Sherri, and I'm a 21st Century Community Learning Centers program director. In podcasts two and three, I shared a process for reviewing your host organization's existing Safety Plan and developing a corresponding Safety Training Plan. In this podcast, I'll share strategies I've used to implement those plans in a way that's sensitive to the emotional and mental health needs of children, staff and families.

I'm raising this issue because people with different life experiences can have different responses to safety drills and exercises. For example, people who've experienced traumatic events, like a hostage situation at a school or losing a family member in a flood, might feel worried or anxious during a lockdown exercise or weather-related drill. As I tell my staff, that doesn't mean we should avoid talking about safety and preparing for every possibility; it means we need to approach safety-related topics in a thoughtful manner. The last thing I'd want to do is make someone feel more fearful instead of more prepared.

Something to consider as you implement your Safety Plan and Safety Training Plan is the age of the students in your program. Students of all ages need to understand why we're doing safety drills and exercises, but it's important to explain "why" in developmentally appropriate ways. You'd have more detail and discussion with high school students than with first graders, for example.

To make sure our safety drills and practices are attuned to the needs and concerns of the people we're trying to protect, I work with program staff to involve students in the development process for safety practices. Before we hold any safety drills or exercises with students, I facilitate a whole-group discussion with staff and students presents. My goal is to open a two-way conversation with students about safety. Some questions I might ask are...

- Why do we practice?
- What is an emergency?
- What are some things we can do to feel safe in an emergency?
- How might we feel in an emergency?
- What would help to make you feel safe during an emergency?
- Would you like to partner with a buddy during an emergency?

Hearing students' answers to questions like these can help us develop comprehensive, student-centered safety plans. For example, in our program, several students said if the power went out in the building after dark, having light would make them feel safe. The very next day, I made sure all staff had access to flashlights with working batteries. I also set up an electronic reminder to check the flashlights for proper functioning on the first day of every month. We followed up with students to let them know we heard their concerns and took immediate action. Student involvement and adult response fosters a sense of credibility and ownership among students. It builds trust and reassures them that we care.



Podcast #4 Transcript: Practice with Sensitivity

My staff and I continue to make space for two-way conversations with students as we prepare them for safety drills and practice sessions. We accomplish this by having a safety lesson once a week during the first month, and once a month thereafter. Each staff member can select when the lesson occurs, as long as it takes place before the related practice drill.

We do the lessons more frequently in the first month because preparation for critical emergencies can't be spread over a program year. After all, there's no guarantee that a potentially life-threatening situation will wait until spring just because you haven't yet gotten around to training staff and students.

The staff members in my program use a variety of resources to expand their lessons and add interest, such as books, toolkits and online games. I purchased two books from National Geographic Kids and distributed them to staff. One book is titled *Once I Was Very Very Scared* by Chandra Ghosh Ippen, and the other is *Extreme Weather: Surviving Tornadoes, Sandstorms, Hailstorms, Blizzards, Hurricanes, and More!* by Thomas Kostigen. Our staff members really appreciate having these on hand, and so do their students.

Staff also use a series created by Sesame Street called *Let's Get Ready: Planning Together for Emergencies*. It's for younger participants. These materials can be found online. Another online resource is [ready.gov](https://www.ready.gov). There are games and resources to help kids understand the importance of preparing for an emergency and what to do if an emergency happens. Also, the Red Cross has number of resources in its Disaster Safety for Children series that can help you support students before, during and after a traumatic event.

You can find information about all of these resources that I just mentioned on the Y4Y website.

Is our time up already? Yes, I think it is! Before I go, I want to thank you for joining me for this Y4Y podcast series on safety planning and practices. Your dedication to safety preparedness underscores a belief I think we share — that, in the end, *people* are the precious cargo of our programs. That includes our staff, our students and their families, visitors and volunteers. Thoughtful, strategic planning for emergency situations can help keep them safe — physically, mentally and emotionally. Thank you.

