



WAUSAU SCHOOL DISTRICT

Longfellow Administration Center

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Dr. Keith W. Hiltz, Superintendent of Schools

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Dear Wausau School District Families:

Here at the Wausau School District, our top priority is both the physical and psychological safety of your students. That's why we put such a focus on being as proactive as possible. For instance, we just hired National School Safety & Security Services to do an audit of our buildings to see if there's any extra layers of security we can implement. It's also why, twice a year, we do something in our schools called ALICE drills. These drills give your students and our staff the opportunity to practice what they should do in the event of a reported threat to safety.

The next drill at your child's school will happen sometime between now and the end of November. Please know, you will be contacted the week of the drill. In preparation for that, we're asking that you take some time to talk with your children about these drills and the challenging topic of violence in schools. Why? Experts say that avoiding the topic can actually make it seem more imminent and threatening to your children. To help with that conversation, here are some tips from mental health experts:

Before the Drill:

- Experts say that when it comes to traumatic events in general, a child does not have to personally experience it to feel the negative effects. With such widespread media coverage of recent tragedies in schools, many children anxiously watched footage of these events along with their families. Even if you tried to shield your child from the horrific events, it is likely that they will hear about it at school or learn more details through friends or social media.
- Prepare your children by setting expectations. You know your child best and your guidance will help them. Let them know that school is a safe place and that part of the job of teachers and school staff is to practice safety skills. "Just like you practice fire drills at school, you also practice ALICE drills so that you know exactly what to do to stay safe in an emergency."
- Make connections to safety habits you already practice. Explain that the ALICE drill is another safety habit, just like the many safety habits you do on a regular basis, for example, wearing seatbelts and bike helmets.
- Though it may be new to your child, the ALICE drill will be best learned through practicing. Self-confidence comes from trying things that are hard and getting better each time.
- Follow your child's lead. If they seem worried or uncomfortable, help them to identify their feelings and talk with them about ways of handling them. Start the conversation and listen carefully. Begin by asking what your children know about the topic of school violence. Listen closely for misinformation, misconceptions, and for underlying concerns and fears.
- Let your child know that schools perform ALICE drills throughout the school year and that they are announced as a drill. Consider your child's unique needs. If you are concerned about how your child will handle the lockdown drill, reach out to the school and partner with your child's teacher to address your concerns.

After the Drill:

- Follow your child's lead.
- Let your child know the school made you aware that there was an ALICE drill that day. Children feel safer when they know that families and schools are working together.
- Ask if they would like to talk about it and let their comments guide you. Children process events in many ways. Some children would prefer not to talk about it, which is okay, too. Some children may simply want to spend some time together in a shared activity with few words. Young children often process through their play.
- If they share that they felt okay about the drill, reinforce that the purpose of the drill is to keep them safe by knowing what to do.
- If they share that they felt scared, sad, or nervous, acknowledge the feeling while directing the student toward positive coping skills. Reassurance is the key: Children need to hear that you are doing exactly what you need to do to keep them safe at home and that school officials are taking every precaution necessary to keep them safe at their school. They also need to be reminded that their only job at school is to focus on learning and enjoying their time with their friends and classmates.

Thank you and be sure to reach out to your child's principal if you have any specific questions about the drill.

Thank you,
Wausau School District Administration

It is the mission of the Wausau School District to advance student learning, achievement, and success.