



Staying Safe
A Safe and Sound Program

STUDENT SAFETY TRAINING

Staying Safe: Developmentally Appropriate Safety Education



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Our Approach to School Safety at Safe and Sound Schools

At Safe and Sound Schools, we believe strongly in a comprehensive approach to school safety. What do we mean when we say comprehensive school safety?

Comprehensive school safety refers to a multi-disciplinary team-based approach to safety planning and programming for a balanced and holistic approach to safety. In other words, comprehensive school safety involves all disciplines to maximize resources and expertise to consider all hazards and all aspects of school safety.

In order for you to be an effective safety leader in your school community, you must understand all the areas encompassing school safety. Rethink school safety by using the comprehensive school safety model to help you assess, plan and develop, and audit safety solutions.





Mental & Behavioral Health

Strong mental and behavioral health resources and programs are critical to a safe school environment. School based mental health providers and behavioral threat assessment teams are just two of the key resources within this field. School counselors, psychologists, and social workers support safety with early interventions, social skill building, providing family support, and leading prevention initiatives in our schools.



Health & Wellness

From allergy care to trauma care, to spotting signs of abuse or neglect, to promoting healthy nutrition and physical activity, to stress management and self-care, promoting the health and wellness of our school community can help us build healthier, safer, and more successful learning environments.



Safety & Security

Safety and Security encompasses tools, technology, landscape, layout and lighting and includes tools that protect our schools and students online and across all the digital and electronic platforms so critical to record keeping, data storage, and communication. Security Directors, Officers, and IT Directors and Specialists develop and implement day-to-day and emergency procedures.



Culture, Climate & Community

Creating a safe and welcoming environment is essential to the safety and success of a school community. Community engagement ensures that stakeholders in the community have a voice and a seat at the table and understand their role in maintaining a safe school. This domain brings stakeholders such as law enforcement, school officials, school security, mental health, students, and parents together to make decisions and plans to optimize safety.



Leadership, Law & Policy

Let's not forget the leaders that provide for opportunities like this from the state and district level to the building level, developing our school policies, ensuring that we comply with regulations, codes, and mandates, and balancing budgets to make it all happen.



Operations & Emergency Management

From day-to-day to emergency operations, our security directors, public safety officials, and emergency managers are great resources for us in developing our EOPs, setting and supervising drills, supporting crisis communication, and responding to school sites to support crisis response, reunification, and recovery efforts.



Staying Safe and Comprehensive School Safety

In line with our comprehensive approach to school safety, our Staying Safe Program supports several of these domains.

As you learn more about the Saying Safe Program, you will see that it aligns to the Culture, Climate & Community domain. The program supports a safe and welcoming environment by teaching staff and students an options-based emergency response framework that equips them with a variety of safety skills that they can use in different situations. We do this by creating a level of familiarity and muscle memory for these actions, building confidence and empowerment over time (Brock et al., 2021; Nickerson & Schildkraut, 2021). Recent research suggests that by preparing staff and students for safety during a crisis can reduce anxiety and increase confidence in their safety (Brock et al., 2021; Nickerson & Schildkraut, 2021). Therefore, the program builds a set of life long skills that students learn early on and can be used, and advanced, as they get older and mature in order to keep adding to their toolbelt. Additionally, a great deal of thought and care has gone into how this material should be presented to students, with both age and ability in mind, leveraging the Mental & Behavioral Health domain.

The Saying Safe Program also touches on the Operations and Emergency Management domain. All security directors, public safety officials, and emergency managers would prefer that an emergency or crisis situation never occurred at a school, but if it does, they want to ensure that staff and students have the tools they need to stay safe.



This program provides the lifelong tools for staff and students that align to and support current procedures and protocols. Staying Safe is designed to dovetail with your current emergency plans and safety drills.



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Staying Safe: The Basics

Staying Safe is an options-based emergency response framework that equips staff and students with a variety of safety skills that they can use in different situations. Recognizing the unique needs of the school environment, Safe and Sound has tailored this program to address the specific roles and responsibilities of school personnel, ensuring that the training is as relevant and effective as possible in a school context.

We aim to teach safety skills as practical actions that individuals can apply based on their circumstances. We call these tools “the life skills of safety.” They’re actionable skills that can be put into practice whenever needed. When faced with a crisis, we need to choose the safety strategy based on the situation at hand—it’s about being prepared with a range of strategies that you can adapt to any situation.

Staying Safe will not introduce any new procedures or protocols. Instead, Staying Safe focuses on personal actions—behaviors and choices—that support decision-making during a crisis or “safety situation.” Where procedures and protocols are community-wide, or macro in focus, Staying Safe is focused on the individual, or micro level.

WHAT IT ISN'T

- Procedures/Protocols
- Prevention
- Recovery
- Replacement of Current Programs
- Sit and Get

WHAT IT IS

- ✓ Options-based education
- ✓ Preparedness
- ✓ Response
- ✓ Extension of Functional Procedures
- ✓ Student-Focused
- ✓ Team-Led



Staying Safe is not focused on prevention like many other important programs and initiatives such as behavioral threat assessment and management, bullying prevention, or suicide prevention. Rather, here we focus on education and training to build preparedness. We are preparing students by giving them “tools” to utilize in a crisis, or “unsafe situation.”

It’s not about the important work of recovery from tragedy, trauma, or crisis; instead it is focused on response, teaching students and staff to respond through practiced and familiar actions to increase their safety.

It’s not a replacement for any of the current programs you’ve got in place. There is no need to reinvent anything! However, it is time to take our efforts to the next level. Staying Safe is ultimately an extension of our functional protocols and procedures, designed to enhance the foundational elements, like the Emergency Operations Plan, already in place!

It’s also not designed to be a “sit and get.” Of course, instruction is needed, but there should be plenty of time for discussion, questions, and teamwork. And once implemented with students, the program comes to life. It’s all about active discussion, exploration, learning and practice to build confidence and competence.

Staying Safe is not the kind of program that can be led by one champion, one SRO, or school leader. It’s going to take a team—your multi-disciplinary school safety team. The program is a great way to galvanize a new team, energize an existing one, and engage the whole school community in the shared responsibility that is school safety.

How To –and Who Should– Use This Guide

This program was developed by Safe and Sound Schools to answer a challenging question that just would not go away: “What if...?” While we’ve made tremendous progress in school safety, we know we can always do better for the safety of our schools and our students. And that’s what this is all about.

It’s important to underscore that this program was developed upon the greater body of knowledge in the field. Best practice informed, Staying Safe reflects guidance from:

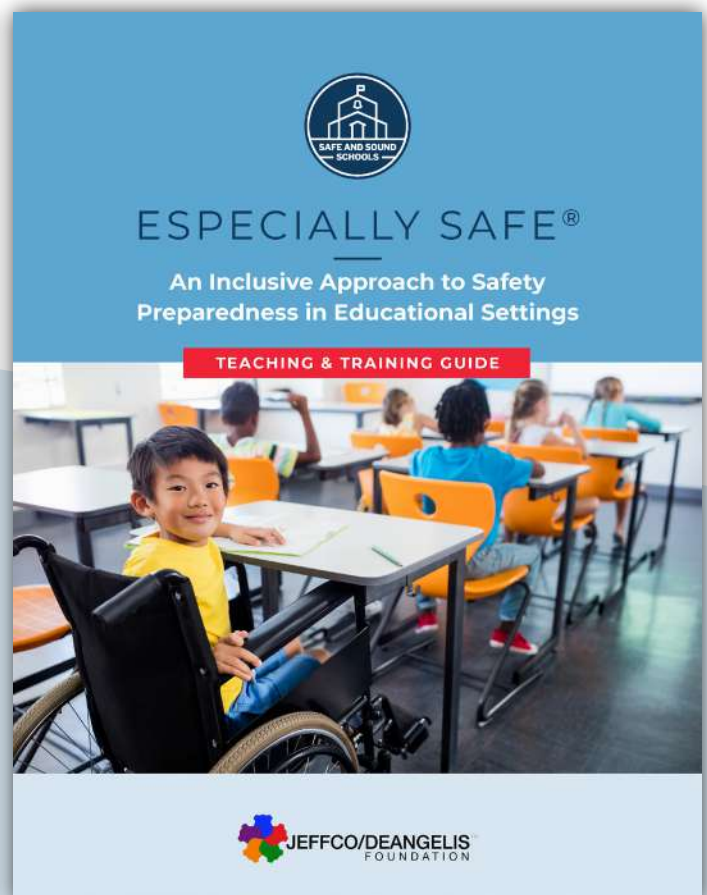
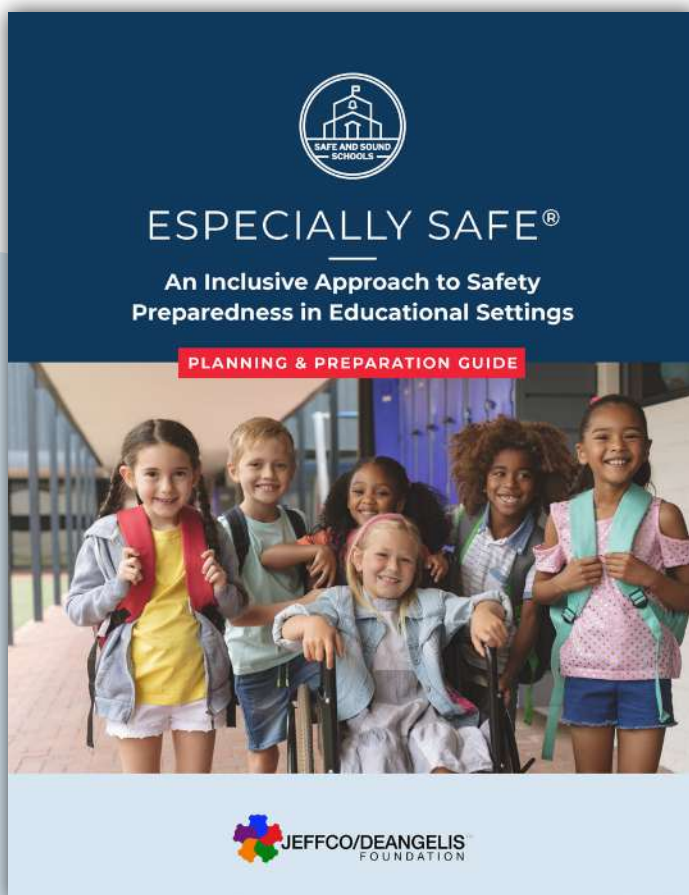
- Advanced Law Enforcement Rapid Response Training (ALERT)
- National Association of School Resource Officers (NASRO)
- Safe and Sound Schools
- National Association of School Psychologists (NASP)
- The US Department of Education, FEMA, DOJ, and Homeland Security
- Texas School Safety Center (TxSSC)
- Texas State University

Specifically, it is important to highlight the Best Practice Considerations for Armed Assailant Drills in Schools resource created by Safe and Sound Schools, NASRO, and NASP (National Association of School Psychologists et al., 2017, 2021) and Safe and Sound’s Especially Safe Program for the safety preparedness of individuals with special needs in the school community (Gay, 2021).

We must also acknowledge that schools are unique environments with student with unique needs. Students are a vulnerable population, and it is vital that when considering comprehensive school safety, our efforts are focused on all students. It is estimated that there are approximately 7.5 million students with disabilities in US schools and approximately 95% of students with disabilities are served within the general education setting (National Center for Education Statistics., 2024).

Further, teaching our students skills that help them think critically about their safety, build their resilience, and empower them to act not only will help them be safe but also buffer the emotional impact of crisis events. Finally, school staff – teachers, administrators, mental health, etc. – know their students best, and in collaboration with physical safety partners, are ideally poised to help students learn how to stay safe.

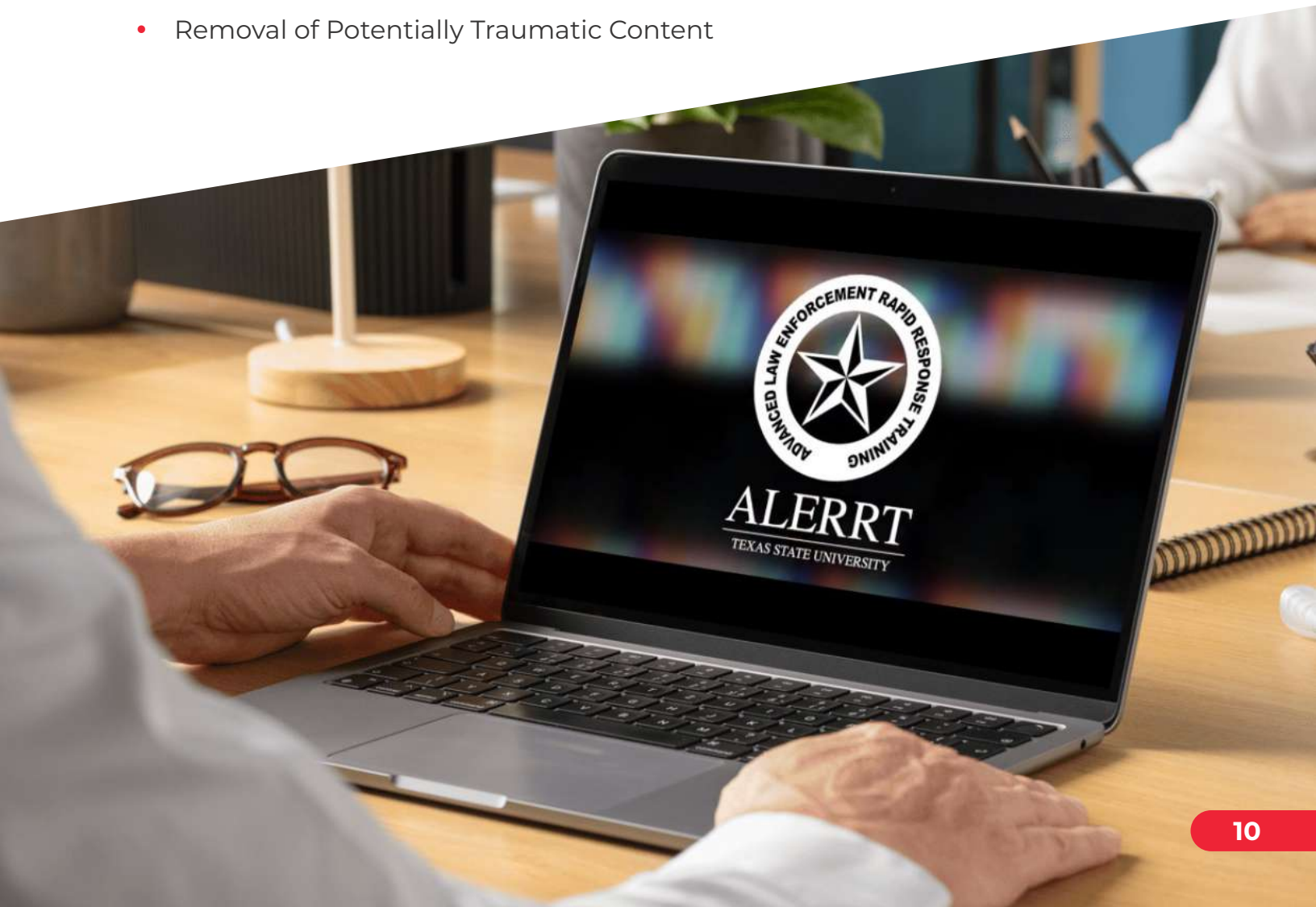
To understand more and effectively strategize to help keep all individuals be safe during emergency events, Safe and Sound School's Especially Safe (Gay, 2021) Program lays a good foundation for understanding the developmental and access and function needs of students and staff. The two components of this program — the *Planning and Preparation Guide* and the *Teaching and Training Guide* — help multi-disciplinary school teams develop plans and practice, and effectively support the unique needs of students and staff so everyone is safe across a variety of protocols and hazards. For more information see the [Especially Safe](#) program page.



Next, Staying Safe was adapted from CRASE (Civilian Response to Active Shooter Events) (Texas State University, n.d.) developed by Texas State University's ALERRT program (Texas State University, 2004), which stands for "Advanced Law Enforcement Rapid Response Training." This program was designed to help civilians prepare for and respond to active shooter incidents in a variety of environments. Its core principles focus on immediate and effective actions to increase safety and survival in critical situations before law enforcement arrives.

Recognizing the unique needs of the school environment, Safe and Sound has adapted ALERRT's CRASE specifically for school settings. We've tailored the program to address the specific roles and responsibilities of school personnel, ensuring that the training is as relevant and effective as possible in a school context. There are three main areas where we've made adaptations:

- Emphasis on Life Skills
- Reduced Length of Training
- Removal of Potentially Traumatic Content



The Impact of Targeted School Violence

The Columbine High School attack is one of the most pivotal events in the history of school violence. This and other incidents continue to serve as the catalyst that significantly shape emergency response protocols. The actions and decisions of staff from Columbine and other school crises helped us to understand factors that need to be addressed to help people be safe during emergency events.

- **Lack of Pre-Planning:** Many in schools have no prior training or experience for such situations.
- **Fear for Personal Safety:** Concern for one's own safety can be overwhelming.
- **Available Guidance:** At the time of Columbine, advice was based on general protocols, which emphasized hiding, "staying down," and locking doors..

These tragic events underscore the importance of preparation and training for emergencies. The lessons learned from these tragedies highlight the critical need for clear, practical response strategies that can be applied under extreme pressure. As we move forward, our goal is to ensure that everyone is equipped with effective tools and strategies for staying safe in an emergency.

Factors Contributing to Casualties in Active Attacks

The number of fatalities during an active attack event is largely a result of two key factors. First, how quickly the police arrive at the scene, and second, the availability of targets in the area (Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2025).

Let's start with police response time. We know that police are extensively trained to respond swiftly to active attacks. However, the time it takes for them to arrive is something we cannot directly influence. This is why it's crucial to understand that, in the moment of an attack, school personnel are the true first responders until law enforcement arrives.



The second factor is referred to as “target availability” by public safety professionals. This refers to how accessible individuals are to the attackers. The less accessible people are, the fewer targets there are for the attacker, which can potentially reduce the number of casualties (Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2025).

Our training aims to address this factor by making students and staff less available. This involves strategies and actions that reduce the number of people exposed to potential harm. By implementing these strategies, we increase our chances of minimizing the number of casualties.



To summarize, while we cannot control how quickly the police arrive, we can control how we respond in the interim. By focusing on making ourselves and others less available to violence, we contribute to reducing the overall number of deaths in such tragic events.

Understanding How the Body Responds in a Crisis

Amanda Ripley conducted research to understand the patterns of survival and death during disasters (Ripley, 2018). Ripley identified a universal three-phase process that everyone goes through when a disaster strikes. First, “denial,” then “deliberation,” and finally, a “decisive moment.” These phases are often emotional and psychological in nature, involving initial denial, deliberation, and finally, decisive action.

Denial

People often fail to recognize the reality of a disaster or underestimate its severity. This denial can cause dangerous delays in taking action. When people delay their response, it can lead to tragic consequences, including loss of life.

Let’s explore some of the psychological reasons behind these delayed reactions. There are two key concepts to understand here: **Normalcy Bias** (Ripley, 2018) and **Social Proof** (Cialdini, 1993).

The first concept is Normalcy Bias. The brain tends to interpret new situations as something familiar, fitting them into our existing mental models. For example, in active shooter situations, people often describe the sound of gunshots as fireworks. Why? Because the brain finds it easier to process something familiar and non-threatening, like fireworks, rather than something more dangerous, like gunfire.

The second concept is Social Proof. We are inherently social beings and tend to look to others for cues on how to behave, particularly in uncertain or ambiguous situations. Think about a time you were at a formal dinner party and weren’t sure which fork to use. What did you do? You probably looked at others around you to see what they were doing and followed suit. In disaster situations, this same behavior applies. If a few people start to take the correct action, others are likely to follow, which can lead to more lives being saved.

The key takeaway is the importance of awareness. By understanding these biases—Normalcy Bias and Social Proof—we can better train and prepare people to recognize and respond appropriately in disaster situations. The goal is to minimize delays and improve survival rates. Being aware of these psychological factors can significantly impact how we approach disaster preparedness. By addressing these biases, we can help people respond more effectively when disaster strikes, potentially saving many lives.

Deliberation

Let's explore an important aspect of the human brain: its reflective thinking capacity. Understanding how our reflective brain works can help us better understand decision-making processes, especially in complex situations.

The reflective brain is often referred to as the 'thinking brain' because it is responsible for conscious, deliberate thought processes. Let's go through some key characteristics of this type of thinking:

- The reflective brain is thoughtful and introspective. It doesn't react automatically but instead takes time to evaluate and consider options.
- Unlike the more instinctual parts of our brain, the reflective brain is flexible. It can weigh different possibilities and adapt its thinking based on new information and changing circumstances. This part of the brain focuses on rational analysis. It helps us make logical decisions, especially when faced with complex problems that require careful consideration.
- A key point to note is that the reflective brain operates more slowly than our instinctive or emotional responses. It takes time to process information, deliberate, and come to a decision.
- Engaging the reflective brain takes effort. Unlike quick, automatic reactions, you have to actively think about the situation, weighing pros and cons before arriving at a conclusion.
- While the reflective brain is crucial for making thoughtful and reasoned decisions, it also requires time and effort. This understanding is essential, particularly in scenarios where a deliberate and calculated response is more beneficial than a fast, instinctive one.

In high-stress or life-threatening situations, our brains can shift from reflective thinking to a more primal state—what we often refer to as the ‘lizard brain.’ This transition changes how we react and limits our response options.

The ‘lizard brain,’ or the more primitive part of our brain, is characterized by a few key traits:

- It’s reflexive: It responds automatically without conscious thought. This is the reacting brain, focused solely on immediate survival.
- It has fixed, hardwired responses, which means it doesn’t adapt or change based on the situation.
- It’s emotional. Decisions made in this state are driven by raw emotion rather than rational analysis
- It’s fast. The lizard brain is very fast; it reacts almost instantaneously because it is designed for survival.
- It’s automatic. Its reactions often happen without us even realizing it.

When the lizard brain takes over, we are typically left with only a few basic survival responses:

- **Fight:** Engaging in direct confrontation.
- **Flight:** Running away from the danger.
- **Freeze:** Becoming immobilized and not knowing what to do.
- **Follow:** This is a response that Safe and Sound decided to include, based on the experiences shared by Lisa Hamp, a survivor of the Virginia Tech shooting. During the attack, she found herself in a ‘follow’ mode, looking to others to decide what to do next. It is an excellent example of how social proof helped her to move quickly through the three phases to a decisive moment.

In high-stress situations, our goal is to keep the human brain—the thinking brain—running for as long as possible. When we can keep our thinking brain engaged, we are more likely to make rational, effective decisions. Today, we will explore some techniques that can help you achieve this.

But let's be realistic—everyone has a limit. Under extreme stress, there comes a point when the human brain shuts down, and the lizard brain—the part of our brain that handles reflexive survival responses—takes over. The good news is, we can 'pre-program' our lizard brain for crisis situations through scripting and practicing. Think of it like rehearsing for a performance. The more you practice, the more automatic your response becomes.

Decisive Moment:

Once a decision is made, act with purpose. In moments of crisis or uncertainty, hesitation can be costly.

The worst thing we can do is nothing. Inaction or delaying decisions often leaves us vulnerable, allowing situations to worsen or opportunities to slip away. Taking action, even if it's not perfect, moves us forward and opens up possibilities for better outcomes.

Remember, decisive action, rooted in clear intent, can make all the difference in high-pressure situations.

What Does This All Mean?

Ripley found that survivors tend to go through these phases faster compared to those who do not survive. Critical survival actions are often taken at the decisive moment, which can make a significant difference.

Preparation before a disaster is crucial. People who survive often do so because they have prepared themselves mentally and practically for emergencies. This preparation allows them to make faster decisions and take effective actions when a crisis occurs. Understanding these phases and the importance of preparation can enhance disaster preparedness and increase survival rates, as well as build resilience that helps to buffer the emotional impact of the event.

Avoid, Deny, Defend

Since 2002, the Advanced Law Enforcement Rapid Response Training (ALERT) Program at Texas State University has been used to train law enforcement officers across the nation in how to rapidly respond to dangerous active threat situations. Recognizing the need for a civilian version of the options-based program, ALERT developed CRASE, or Civilian Response to Active Shooter Events. The program centers around teaching 3 primary responses to an active attack. **It is important to note that CRASE was developed for adult civilians, not children or youth (much more on these important stakeholders shortly!).**

Avoid: starts with your state of mind

- Pay attention to your surroundings.
- Have an exit plan.
- Move away from the source of the threat as quickly as possible.
- The more distance and barriers between you and the threat, the better.

Deny: when getting away is difficult or maybe impossible

- Keep distance between you and the source.
- Create barriers to prevent or slow down a threat from getting to you.
- Turn the lights off.
- Remain out of sight and quiet by hiding behind large objects and silence your phone.

Defend: because you have the right to protect yourself

- If you cannot “Avoid” or “Deny,” be prepared to defend yourself.
- Be aggressive and committed to your actions.
- Do not fight fairly.
- THIS IS ABOUT SURVIVAL.

CRASE stresses the importance of moving into the Deliberation phase during an active threat situation. If you hear gunshots, or even something that might be gunshots, it's crucial to immediately enter the Deliberation phase. In situations like these, we cannot afford to deny what is happening. Quickly recognizing the reality of the situation and preparing to act can save lives. The key takeaway is to trust your instincts. If something sounds off, treat it seriously and move into the Deliberation phase. This is where you assess your options and prepare to take action.

Adapting CRASE for Students

In order to accommodate staff and students using a trauma-informed approach, those who are familiar with CRASE, may notice below that “Defend” has been changed to “Disrupt”. Note that we are not taking “Defend” away as an option, only folding it into the much broader umbrella of “Disrupt” to allow for a variety of age and ability approaches to the action.

As we discuss later in this program guide, one's ability to contribute to safety practices is based on age and ability, even through this lens there is a great deal of variability. The understanding of safety actions and language vary and will look different given a first-grade student compared to an 11th grade student (much more on language ahead!). This is based on physical and cognitive abilities and the amount of safety skills and knowledge practiced. These variables impact the ability of one to effectively understand and carry out specific safety protocols. Therefore, it is important that students and staff learn and are empowered to stay safe based on these unique variables and characteristics.

For instance, younger students or those individuals with disabilities, their ability to understand and actually “Disrupt” may be limited by a number of factors. But teaching strategies and skills so they understand how and when to “Hide Out” may be a more effective approach. Again, we do not advocate removing the right to defend oneself, however given developmental, cognitive, and physical limitations this provides another tool in the toolbelt.

For older students and most staff, physically, cognitively, and skill wise, their understanding and ability to “Disrupt” a violent attack is more likely and as such making loud noises, throwing nearby items, anything action to interrupt, distract, slow down an attacker helps to allow for evacuation or an improved safety posture.

The Staying Safe Program

The Toolbelt Concept

Let's explore a crucial concept in our Staying Safe program—the Toolbelt Concept. This approach is all about equipping individuals with a variety of safety skills that they can use in different situations, much like having a toolbelt filled with essential tools.

Imagine you have a toolbelt. Each tool in that belt represents a different safety skill or action. Just as a carpenter uses different tools for different tasks, we use various safety skills depending on the situation we're facing. This concept emphasizes that safety skills are not one-size-fits-all but rather tools that can be chosen and adapted based on specific needs.

We teach safety skills as tools—practical actions that individuals can apply based on their circumstances. These tools are the life skills of safety. They're not just theoretical; they're actionable skills that can be put into practice whenever needed.

One of the key aspects of this concept is that these tools go with us wherever we go. Whether you're at home, at work, or out in public, you have access to these safety skills. You can use them and swap them as circumstances change. It's about being adaptable and prepared no matter where you are.

The beauty of the Toolbelt Concept is that it encourages critical thinking. When faced with a crisis, you need to choose the best tool—or safety strategy—based on the situation at hand. This means you might use different tools, or even the same tool more than once, depending on what's happening. Our training helps us understand which tool to use by teaching us the right strategies and enhancing our situational awareness.

The Toolbelt Concept in safety is about being prepared with a range of strategies that you can adapt to any situation. Just like a toolbelt that holds different tools for different tasks, your safety skills are versatile and ready to be applied wherever needed. By developing these skills and practicing their use, we enhance our ability to handle emergencies effectively.

The Core Safety Strategies of Staying Safe

Avoid

When you're faced with a crisis, it's crucial to think beyond the primary exit for options to "Avoid" a threat. Consider secondary exits, such as windows, fire escapes, and even the possibility of breaking through drywall if absolutely necessary. Relying solely on one door can be risky, especially if that door becomes inaccessible.

Under extreme stress, our bodies and minds can shut down due to elevated heart rates and stress overload. This physiological response makes it challenging to perform even the most straightforward tasks. What might seem simple in a calm state becomes significantly more difficult in a high-pressure situation.

The key takeaway here is to diversify your evacuation strategies:

- **Explore all possible exits:** Don't rely solely on the main doors. Look for alternative routes like windows or fire escapes.
- **Be prepared to adapt:** If a door is blocked or locked, know how to use other exits or create an emergency path.
- **Practice regularly:** Familiarize yourself with all possible exits in your environment so that under stress, your response becomes more instinctive.

Remember, in an emergency, having multiple exit options can greatly increase your chances of a safe and swift evacuation. Preparation and awareness are your best tools for ensuring safety when every second counts.

Deny

When faced with the threat of an active attack, one of the most important actions you can take is to prevent access to your space. This means barricading doors, locking them, and blocking entry in any way possible. The more obstacles you put between yourself and the threat, the better.

Now, consider all your options. It's not just about locking the door—think about what else is around you that can help. Chairs, tables, filing cabinets—use anything available to create barriers. Can these items be positioned near the doorway for quick and easy access during a crisis?

It's also crucial to know your doors. Some doors push open, while others pull. This can make a big difference in how you respond. Inward-opening doors, for example, are much easier to barricade than outward-opening doors. When you're out and about, take a moment to notice how doors open and what kinds of locking mechanisms they have. This awareness could be vital in a real-life situation.

By being aware of your surroundings and understanding how to quickly and effectively deny access, you're taking significant steps to protect yourself and others.

For those familiar with SRP (Standard Response Protocol) (I Love You Guys Foundation, 2024), you'll notice a natural overlap here with the concepts. This information is very much in alignment with your SRP protocols. A simple locked door has proven, time and again, to be an effective barrier, preventing active shooter suspects from accessing potential victims. The importance of locking the door during a crisis cannot be stressed enough—it's a basic yet vital step in protecting yourself and others. Here the experts and resources from the domain of Safety and Security are critically important to involve in addressing specific physical safety features (locking mechanisms, sidelight and door windows, and code and ADA (American Disability Act) compliance.)

While hiding is not a primary response in an active threat situation, it is a form of "Avoid." And it may be a necessary option in certain circumstances. If you find yourself needing to hide, it's important to assess whether your hiding place provides **cover or concealment**. Cover can shield you from potential harm, while concealment keeps you out of sight. You should also think ahead—if you're discovered, how will you get away or disrupt your attacker to get to safety?

Disrupt

The word "Disrupt" can be defined in several ways:

- To throw into disorder

- To prevent something—a process, system, or event—from continuing
- To interrupt
- To break apart

Each of these definitions speaks to the power of disrupting a situation or a process. In a high-stress scenario, such as an active threat, disruption can be a valuable tool. By throwing a system or plan into disorder, you create opportunities for safety and survival.

When all other options are gone, and your only choice left is to “Disrupt” an attacker, all rules are off. You can throw anything, break anything, punch, kick, bite, yell, whatever you are able to do. It’s about survival, and that means doing whatever it takes.

Our human responses in a crisis are known to be unpredictable. However, it is important to allow for disruptive action as an option. It is a person’s right to save themselves by whatever means necessary as a last resort.

In moments like this, it’s essential to shift your emotions from fear to anger. Fear can freeze you in place, but anger, when channeled properly, can give you the focus and drive to survive. Channel that anger and direct all your aggression toward one purpose: protecting yourself and the innocent people around you.



To review, our aim is to prepare our staff members to get to the point of ‘Deliberation’ as quickly as possible so that they can take decisive action, choosing one of their primary actions: “Avoid,” “Deny,” or “Disrupt,” changing course if needed.

Staying Safe Strategies for Younger Students

In 2013, Safe and Sound released a suite of resources to support developmentally appropriate safety teaching and training of students. The *Stay Safe Choices* were part of those resources and are widely used across all of Safe and Sound's programs.

We will use those as the basis for 3 primary safety actions to introduce to younger students. You will see that each picture represents a safety action. Simple, readable, nondescript scenarios are used so that even students who cannot yet read can look at these pictures and understand the action.

In order to “keep it simple” and developmentally appropriate, and to make it easy to remember, we have chosen to label the actions as; “Get Out,” “Keep Out,” and “Hide Out.” These are universal, age-appropriate actions which can be easily remembered and applied to existing emergency protocols for our younger students.



Get Out

An action we can take if an area ever becomes unsafe for any reason.



Keep Out

An action we can take if we learn of a “safety situation” outside of our room or area.



Hide Out

An action we can take if we learn of a safety situation in our area or nearby.



Staying Safe Strategies for Older Students

As students get older, understanding, ability, and practice experience increases, we can transition the language used to convey these safety strategies. You will see that these are the same safety actions that were adapted by Safe and Sound from ALERRT's CRASE program. From this stage forward, these actions comprise the three primary safety actions for students and staff.

Note, there is nothing wrong with sticking with the elementary language if that is more appropriate for your students. Unlike our protocols, which require standard, common language, these safety actions are really more about “mindset” or how we “think” about safety. If it is easier for students to think in terms of “Get Out” than “Avoid,” that is what is best!

However, when making the transition to the terms “Avoid,” “Deny,” and “Disrupt,” recognize that we are introducing a new action, a new concept: “Disrupt.” The “Hide” action introduced for earlier learners is simply folded into the “Avoid” action at this developmental level.

Again, we are still making use of icons for ease of use and to accommodate a variety of learners. When introducing these options to students for the first time, it is important to help them connect their prior experiences and language with the new.

Some items to discuss with students during this transition:**Avoid**

What are ways you can avoid an unsafe situation? Where are your primary and secondary exits? Don't limit yourself to doors. Think about windows, fire escapes, and other areas of evacuation. Can you think of other ways to avoid an unsafe situation?

**Deny**

A simple locked door can and has prevented an aggressor or unsafe person from gaining access. What can you place in front of the door for added protection? Where in the room can you go to be “out of sight”? Can you think of other options to deny an unsafe person?

**Disrupt**

If you are unable to avoid or deny, you still have the option to disrupt. Again, this is always going to be a personal decision. Ways that you can disrupt could include making distracting sounds, pushing over/throwing items, defensive, or even offensive action. All these options can disrupt an aggressor from their actions.

Normally, fighting is unacceptable and against the rules in school. But when we are in an emergency, your safety is the first priority. And breaking our normal safety rules to protect yourself might help you to “Get Out,” “Keep Out,” or “Hide Out!” For example, you might need to exit from a window, block the locked door with a teacher’s desk, or hide in the teacher’s lounge. Similarly, you might need to fight back against someone who is trying to harm you. Remember that fighting is a personal choice, a civil right that no one is going to take away from you, but we aren’t here to teach anyone fighting skills, nor is that an expectation. When all other options are exhausted, you have the right to fight back.

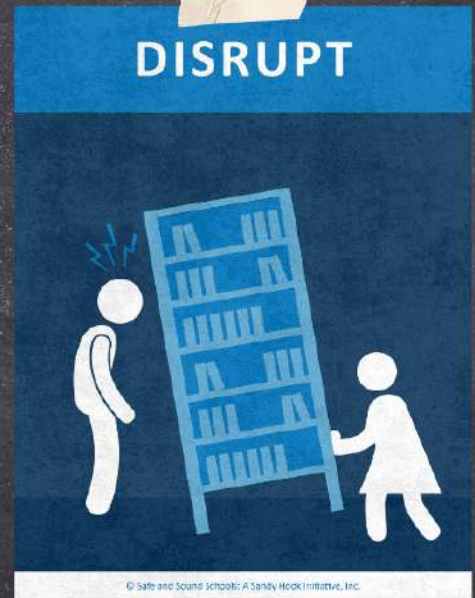
AVOID



DENY



DISRUPT



Disrupt

- optional
- personal choice
- not an expectation

How Staying Safe Program Fits With Your Safety Efforts

You may be thinking, “How does it fit with everything else we’ve got going already? How will I justify one more thing? Does it conflict with our current programs, procedures, protocols?”

For example, perhaps you use the Standard Response Protocol (SRP) Shelter protocols from the I Love U Guys Foundation consisting of “Hold,” “Secure,” “Lockdown,” “Evacuate,” and “Shelter.” *Staying Safe* provides additional options for both staff and students if they are unable to “Lockdown” because of their location (e.g., in the gym). Maybe they can “Avoid” by self-evacuating or are able to get in another locked space to “Deny” access (I Love U Guys Foundation, n.d.).

Staying Safe is designed to wrap around and support your current procedures and protocols, dovetailing with your current safety drills. For example, providing answers to some of the tough questions our staff, students, and families have been asking of us for far too long, like “What if Lockdown isn’t enough?” or “What if I’m in the bathroom?” and helping to build the skills of safety on the individual level.





Staying Safe vs. Other Options-Based Response Programs

We recognize that there are other options-based response programs and models, but a few things separate *Staying Safe*:

- It is designed and developed specifically for schools and educational communities.
- It is rooted in a strong, research-informed evidence base.
- A great deal of thought and care went into how this material should be presented to students, with both age and ability in mind.
- It is meant to be a set of lifelong skills that students learn early on and can be used, and advanced, as they get older and mature in order to keep adding to their toolbelt.
- It aligns with a comprehensive approach to school safety and works alongside other important safety programs, plans, and procedures.

Training

Training for Staff

Staff **MUST** be educated, trained, informed, and comfortable with the concepts of *Staying Safe* before it is rolled out to students. Staff must be trained in CRASE (ideally with abbreviated *Staying Safe* version). Then, staff should receive careful instruction and resources for teaching students. Note that these concepts and resources can be spaced out as much as needed to provide staff time to absorb the content and become comfortable with the concepts.

Teaching and Training Students

As we move into teaching our students these important strategies, we must discuss the principles of developmentally appropriate learning. These are our rules of the road for this adventure: empowering students with their own safety skills.

Here we outline the principles, or key considerations of developmentally appropriate learning.

Key Considerations: Teaching & Training General Safety Preparedness



Ask the
Experts



All Hazards
Approach



Teaching
Before
Training



Skills For
Life



No Drama,
No Trauma



Words
Matter



1. ASK THE EXPERTS:

When we talk about experts, a certain image probably comes to mind. Maybe it's someone with a lot of letters after their name, an important title, a leadership role, or maybe even a renowned author, researcher, or speaker. Those people are all important; however, the experts we are talking about are found in our school buildings, driving our bus routes, engaging with our students, and so on. These are the folks that know our students and our schools best.

Before we begin any teaching on safety protocols, it's crucial that we work with the experts in the school and the broader community. When it comes to safety approaches and how to teach students effectively, the first step is to identify who those experts are. We need to determine who understands the students and the needs of the community best.

It's essential that we include as many key stakeholders as possible in this process. By involving different perspectives, we ensure that the approach is comprehensive and meets the diverse needs of students and staff.



2. ALL HAZARDS APPROACH

Our schools face many different kinds of threats today, so it is no surprise that we advocate an all-hazards approach to safety. An all-hazards approach helps us to be as prepared as possible. It also does a few other important things for us:

- It creates balance, preventing us from becoming hyper-focused on any one type of threat, inadvertently leaving us vulnerable for another.
- It also helps our school community to think more generally about safety, and not become overwhelmed or anxious about any one threat, such as the threat of a school attack.

When we invite our students and staff to think in terms of safety and stock their tool belts with universal tools, suddenly, safety becomes more simplified.



3. TEACHING BEFORE TRAINING

As we discuss safety training and preparation for students, it's important to remember the principle of teaching before training. What does that mean? It means that before we engage in actual drills or practice, we provide simple, developmentally appropriate learning opportunities to help students become familiar and comfortable with the concepts and actions.

In the same way, when we're teaching safety protocols for emergencies, we need to break it down into manageable steps that are appropriate for the learner. We need to explain, demonstrate, and make sure everyone understands before we put them into a real-world scenario, even if it's just a drill.

This approach not only helps reduce fear and anxiety, but it also ensures that individuals are prepared and confident when the time comes to practice or engage in a drill.



4. SKILLS FOR LIFE

The goal here is to provide 'safety skills for life' by equipping students with the right tools for their toolbox. These tools aren't just for one specific emergency or event; they are designed to increase safety across various settings and circumstances.

The theme throughout this program is simple: students need tools they can understand, that they can use in a wide variety of emergencies, and that they can maintain and grow throughout their lives. These tools are the skills and strategies we are teaching them, empowering them to think critically and respond effectively in any situation.

By developing these skills and adding these tools to their mental toolbox, we're not just preparing students for a single event—we're preparing them for life. The tools they gain here will help them navigate any challenges that come their way, whether in school, at home, or in any other environment.



5. NO DRAMA, NO TRAUMA

Our focus is on teaching skills and behaviors through discussions and activities that foster learning, and empowerment, not fear. Our aim is to help students move through their reactions during a crisis to a place of decision making and action. We do this by creating a level of familiarity and muscle memory for these actions, building confidence and empowerment

In the same way, when it comes to safety training for potential threats, we aim to create a calm, informative environment where students can learn valuable life skills without the added burden of fear. Our goal is to empower students with knowledge and understanding so that they feel ready, not frightened.



6. WORDS MATTER

Especially when teaching and training children, and even more so when teaching and training about potentially stressful or frightening circumstances, the words we use can make all the difference. A focus on the positive—“staying safe” as opposed to “being in danger,” and “the helpers all around us” as opposed to “a bad guy,” helps reframe our purpose from preparing for a crisis to *preparing for safety*.



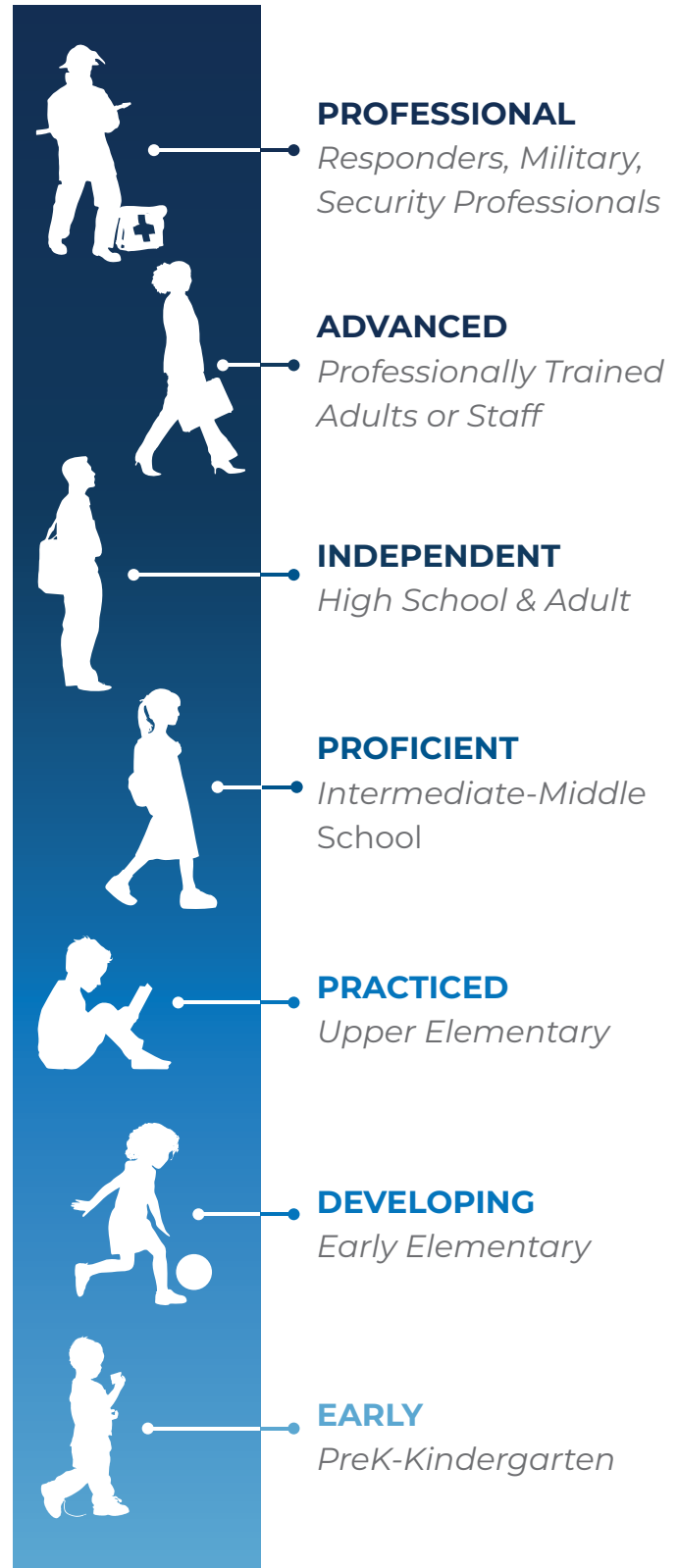
Developmentally Appropriate: Age and Ability and Developmental Levels

Now, we need to establish what we mean by developmentally appropriate. We look at “Developmentally Appropriate” as the balance of two metrics: age and ability.

An individual’s age is a good place to start when we look at what teaching/training is appropriate for them. But that’s certainly just a start. The other, more important metric, which does not always align with an individual’s age, is ability. An example is a high school student with an Individualized Education Plan or IEP, who may actually be closer to a second-grader cognitively.

Also factoring into ability are experiences, history, learning disabilities, physical challenges, and more. But remember, we have the experts to refer to—these are the people who know each student best.

We consider the figure to the right as we dive deeper into each side of the scale. Here you see age represented pictorially in the left side column, with people of various ages. Age is a good starting place, because it’s the most readily available piece of information we have on a student and generally it gives us an idea of ability level.



Developmental levels are represented on the right side, from Early to Advanced as aligned with typical developmental stages. When you use this scale, you will start with age but weigh the characteristics of each of those levels (listed by name on the right side) more heavily.

EARLY:

Starting at the early level, generally, the pre-K to kindergarten level, you would expect a typical child to demonstrate a general understanding of danger. They've heard about what is safe or not safe, they know not to touch something hot, to hold hands when we cross the street. But they are heavily or completely reliant upon adult direction and management during a crisis.

They are capable of practicing basic safety options such as "Get Out" or "Hide Out" as commanded by an adult. Notice that we are using the words "Get Out" instead of evacuate. Of course it is fine to use big words with little kids, but when it comes to safety concepts, we will ensure that all students understand what we are doing by keeping our language simple and accessible. Remember, words matter.

This group will understand, hide out, stay out of sight, lights off, stay quiet. They're also capable of understanding the concept of keep out as demonstrated by the teacher keeping a danger out during a Lockdown.

DEVELOPING:

Moving up the scale to 'Developing,' this group is typically around first and second grade age. They have all of the characteristics of 'Early' awareness but they have more experience now. They are typically capable at this point of providing basic assistance in an emergency. They love their jobs! For example, they may be capable of turning lights off, calling 911, closing the blinds, etc. They can follow general safety instructions.

PRACTICED:

Moving up a little further, the 'Practiced' level is typically upper elementary, probably third, fourth, & fifth graders. This group demonstrates all of the characteristics of 'Developing' awareness, but at this stage they are also capable of assisting an adult in an emergency with actions like closing the door or helping to move furniture around to form a barricade. Providing this group with manageable roles, expectations, and jobs, can be beneficial to them in a crisis as it can increase their sense of control during uncertain circumstances.

PROFICIENT:

This group is likely intermediate/middle schoolers, or fifth/sixth through eighth graders. They've got all the practiced skills and have been part of many school drills. They are able to perform tasks in an emergency without adult commands. This level is where you might introduce the more adult language of "Avoid," "Deny," "Disrupt." Remember, they may or may not demonstrate the ability to disrupt the actions of an attacker. It is not our expectation that they 'disrupt,' only something we need to be aware of and prepared for.

INDEPENDENT:

The Independent level is where we look at high schoolers and many of our adults. They have all of the skills of the Proficient level but at this point, they have practiced their safety skills to the point where most can demonstrate the ability to independently apply and adapt their safety skills and knowledge to a variety of situations. The more adaptable we can make our students and staff the safer they will be. We want them thinking about safety in that tool belt capacity. They may or may not demonstrate the ability to disrupt or thwart the actions of an attacker. Again, it will never be an expectation of our students to "Disrupt," and we will not be teaching tactics in school, but if they have skills and confidence of their own to bring to a situation, it is their right to do what they need to to be safe.

ADVANCED:

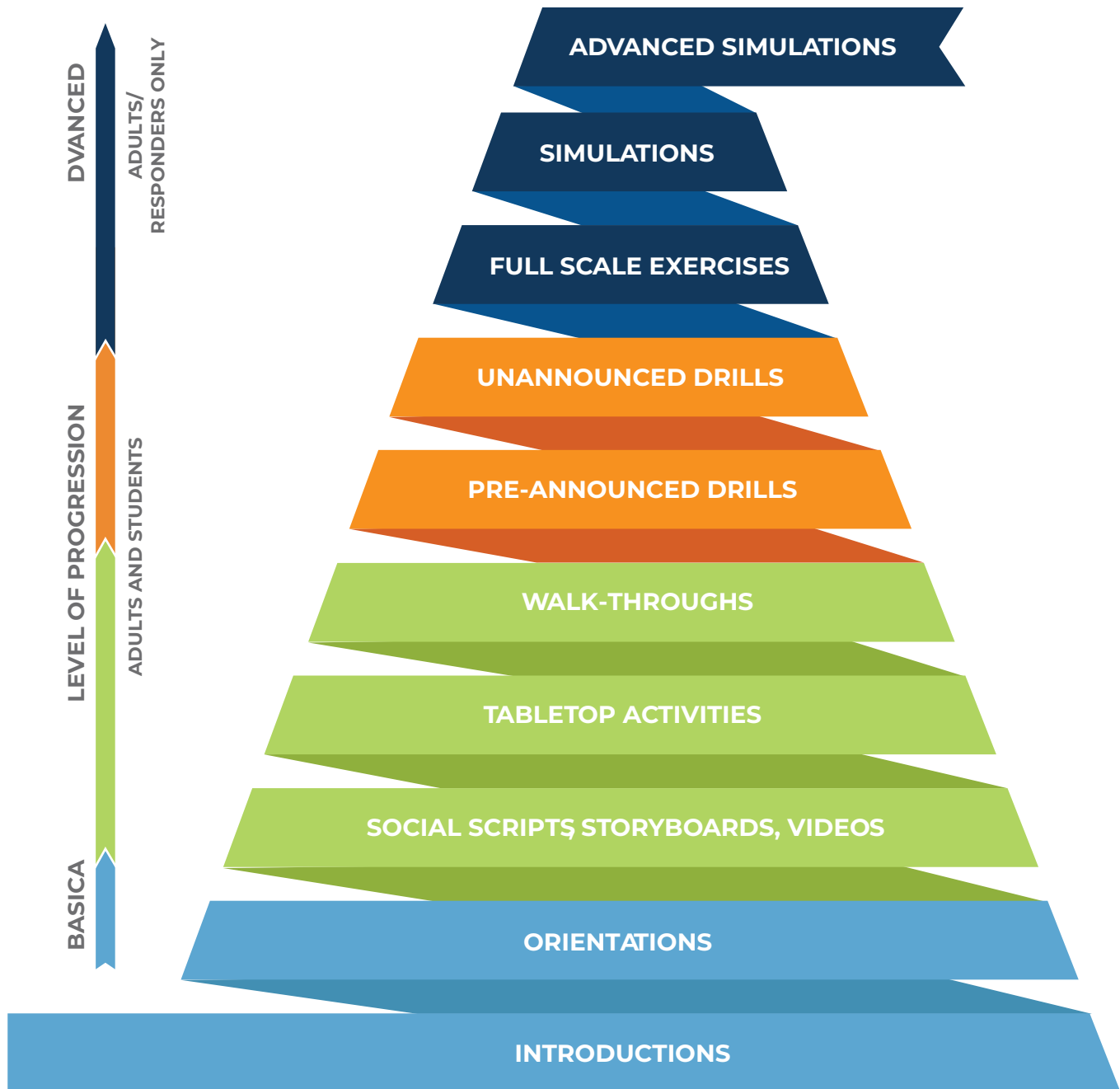
Advanced is where we hope to find our school staff. These are the adult personnel that are in the building serving kids. They have been trained to know their own safety actions and responsibilities. They will demonstrate all the characteristics of independent awareness. They are capable of leading others in an emergency as they have been trained to. They may or may not be capable of disruption of behavior when confronted by an attacker.

PROFESSIONAL:

Professionals are highly trained safety professionals such as military personnel, police, paramedics, and fire fighters. Many of these professionals are trained and equipped to provide tactical response and counter measures to protect life in an emergency or a crisis. They have trained at a level of high intensity, as adults and by choice, to be able to respond in times of extreme crisis to save lives. We include this level to illustrate that it is separate and above any type of training staff or students will receive.

Hierarchy of Teaching and Learning

Once we determine where to meet our students, it's time to determine what sort of teaching and training activities will best suit them. Below is the [Hierarchy of Education and Training](#) pyramid. It presents a hierarchical, or ordered, menu of activities from most basic to most advanced.



Hierarchy of Teaching and Training Activities

BOTTOM:

The bottom part of the scale is where orientations and introductions fall. We see a lot of introductions and orientations and at the start of the year, at the beginning of assemblies or start of field trips. Anytime the setting is new to students, take a few moments to orient everyone for safety. Introductions are powerful opportunities to build relationships within the building and with community safety partners. Introduce students to the people around them that are here to help, the counselor, school nurse, SRO, etc.

LOWER MIDDLE:

Moving up the scale, into the next section, is where most of the teaching happens. These are all low stress opportunities to gain familiarity and confidence with new concepts of safety. Social stories, storyboards, videos, tabletop activities, games, and walkthroughs. A great example of a way that we often use walkthrough is a slow-motion walkthrough of the steps of an upcoming fire drill. Again, these are low stress, no stress kind of activities which allow us to act things out, walk through the motions, and possibly role play to problem solve together. Students get to ask questions and share observations along the way. It's a trauma-informed way for us to practice the safety actions that we might need. This is that teaching before the training piece.

UPPER MIDDLE:

The next section is where we drill. We have the opportunity to test, practice, and improve utilizing drills and exercises. The most advanced form of training that students and staff will receive for safety are drills. Drills are planned and may be delivered in collaboration with emergency responders. Drills are where we spend most of our time involving students in safety. They are and continue to be very important to the work we do to keep the school community safe. Through this program, we invite you to flip the script and spend most of your time with students in the bottom half of the pyramid, with learning activities, building confidence and understanding, familiarity and knowledge, building skills for safety.

TOP:

Lastly, at the top of the pyramid we have full scale exercises, simulations, and advanced simulations. These are for the highly trained emergency responders. It is important to check policy, procedures, and state law with regard to any exercises that could involve students. We include this level of training in the pyramid to demonstrate that the kind of training our emergency responders receive is separate, different, and far and above what our students and staff will receive.

Bringing it All Together

Now, considering our key considerations, developmental appropriateness, and the Teaching and Learning Pyramid, let's talk about how we might introduce *Staying Safe* terms to our students using the following step-by-step progression.

1. First, we '**INTRODUCE**'. In other words, 'I do.' I, as the teacher, demonstrate, model or explain.
2. Then, we '**EXPLORE**' together. In other words, 'We do' our exploration together through activities and discussion. We provide opportunities for teachers and students to explore new concepts together.
3. After that, we '**PRACTICE**'. We begin to transition from 'We do' to 'You do,' inviting students to practice with adult direction and supervision, stepping back to a facilitative role.
4. Finally, we '**FOLLOW UP**' continually to maintain and grow student independence and confidence by providing opportunities to review and extend our skills and knowledge. YOU DO – Students then can demonstrate their knowledge of the skills.

We should offer teaching and training opportunities through this progression, gradually building students mastery and confidence with their new knowledge and skills.

On the following page is an example of what it might look like at the elementary versus the secondary level. Again, the activities focus on student knowledge of safety practices, their ability to learn, and ultimate perform safety tasks.



First, in an elementary classroom, we may bring our students to the carpet or circle for morning meeting. We would then show each of the *Staying Safe* images one by one without the terminology and ask students to describe what they see. After going through each image, we would again ask students what each of the *Staying Safe* terms means to them. This would be an “I do” introduction of the program and terminology to students.

We can then move on to letting students “explore.” The teacher would gather materials to lead the class in making their own school safety tool belt as pictured in the activity below. Each student would have the *Stay Safe Choice Card*, popsicle sticks, and cardstock to make their belt. They would be then instructed to cut out each *Stay Safe Choice* and attach the popsicle stick to the back of the card. Then they could make and decorate their tool belt.

Once done, the students can put on their toolbelts, tucking in their *Stay Safe* tools. The teacher would then teach each student the *Stay Safe Choices* – “Get Out,” “Keep Out,” and “Hide Out” – and provide simple “safety situations” to the class, inviting students to discuss which “tool” they could use, raise their choice once decided, and discuss as a whole group.

Grades PK-2 Application: Stay Safe Toolbelt Activity



Build your safety toolbelt! Using the materials and directions below, decorate your own set of stay safe choices. Together, we'll practice choosing each tool with safety stories.

GET OUT



KEEP OUT



HIDE OUT



each Stay Safe Choice card
tape to the back of each card

make your “belt”
then your belt”

on paper

if needed
other decorative items



Stay Safe Choice card.

to the back of each card (so you can hold it up like a sign).
and your waist (snug enough to let you tuck each popsicle
belt and your body).

buckle” your belt, one at the top and one at the bottom of the

5. Trim on extra and more length by stapling another strip onto the end.

6. Take your belt off to decorate it. Make it your own with crayons, markers, stickers, a construction paper “pouch” and “buckle” if you like!

We could use a similar process with our older students. After introducing the *Staying Safe* concepts and terminology, educators can utilize one of the *Explore* activities for this specific age group. Moving beyond introducing and exploring, we can let students “practice.”

For example, older and more able students at the proficient and independent developmental levels have the ability to discuss and reason based on the safety skills they have learned over the years. One activity at this level could be the *Stop Motion* activity. Students are given a variety of scenarios and in small groups act out the situation have a director and an actor(s). The director will state “Stop Motion” during the scenario and the actors will freeze. At this point the class can give options or ask questions about the scenario. This way the students can discuss the pro’s and con’s about decisions and problems solutions, again pulling from the toolbelt they have built up over time.



Implementing Staying Safe

Implementation Planning

First gather your multi-disciplinary teams. Ideally the whole team is trained before bringing the program back to the school community.

The team develops an implementation plan, committing to the program principals and key considerations (i.e., age/ability appropriate, trauma-informed, etc.). Critical conversations around the follow questions can help orient the team and the program in it mission, direction, and goals.

- How might you plan to incorporate these learning opportunities into the school day?
- How would these learning opportunities fit into the school year/calendar? Lessons over a period of time? Weekly? Monthly? Throughout the school year?
- How will you ensure that instruction and learning is delivered with consistency?
- How could you maintain and reinforce these skills and build upon this knowledge throughout the year?
- How could these activities fit into, align with, or build upon your current emergency operations plans (EOP), safety practices, drills, etc.?
- Are there key stakeholders that need to be aware/educated in order to better support your community before, during, and after a crisis?
- How might you modify activities to meet the needs of students with trauma experiences, developmental disabilities, or other needs? What supports could be made available to students during implementation? Staff?
- What types of parent/family outreach might you utilize to gain buy-in from the community?
- Are there key stakeholders you might need to bring on board first?

- How might you phase in the roll out of this program in your school community(ies)?
- What would be a realistic timeline for implementation from start to finish?

Next school staff is trained, providing adequate time for familiarity and confidence building. Staff must be trained in CRASE (ideally with abbreviated *Staying Safe* version).

Then, staff receive careful instruction and resources for teaching students. Note that these concepts and resources can be spaced out as much as needed to provide staff time to absorb the content and become comfortable with the concepts.

Next, parents are informed about the program. We have provided several parent resources, template letters, community night presentations, and a flier to support the outreach and education process. The success of your roll out will require parent and family support. Keep parents informed of what you are teaching their kids. Provide full transparency and opportunities to ask questions or express concerns. In addition to letters home, there are numerous ways to garner parent and family support. Whether through offering 'Coffee and Conversation,' 'Parent Nights,' Facebook Live sessions, or webinars, provide parents opportunities to learn about and support the program at home!

Lastly, and after careful team planning, student roll out begins!



1. Gather the Multi-disciplinary Team to Plan



2. Train Staff: CRASE



3. Train Staff: Student Curriculum



4. Parent Outreach



5. Student Training

Additional Resources

Posters

- **Combined Poster (K-5)** – a poster that can be used in the classroom and around the school to illustrate the three core K-5 actions.
- **Individual Action Posters (K-5)** – individual posters with each of the K-5 actions on its own poster for educating and teaching.
- **Combined Poster (6-12)** – a poster that can be used in the classroom and around the school to illustrate the three core 6-12 actions.
- **Individual Action Posters (6-12)** – individual posters with each of the 6-12 actions on its own poster for educating and teaching.

Classroom Activities and Discussion Guides

- **Teacher Toolkit and Discussion Guide (PK-2)** – this toolkit provides a scope and sequence, including age-appropriate activities, to educate and teach PK-2 students.
- **Teacher Toolkit and Discussion Guide (3-5)** – this toolkit provides a scope and sequence, including age-appropriate activities, to educate and teach 3-5 students.
- **Teacher Toolkit and Discussion Guide (6-8)** – this toolkit provides a scope and sequence, including age-appropriate activities, to educate and teach students in grades 6-8.
- **Teacher Toolkit and Discussion Guide (9-12)** – this toolkit provides a scope and sequence, including age-appropriate activities, to educate and teach students grades 9-12.

Home and Community Engagement

- **Parent & Community Presentation Slide Deck** – use this slide deck to assist you in sharing this program with parents, guardians, and the broader community.
- **Sample Parent/Guardian Letter & Flyer** – this sample letter and flyer can be used to send home with students or make available at a school function for parents, guardians, and community members who want to know more.
- **Take Home Activities (PK-2)** – a set of activities for PK-2 students that can be shared with parents, guardians, and community members so that the core safety strategies can be reenforced at home.
- **Take Home Activities (3-5)** – a set of activities for students in grades 3-5 that can be shared with parents, guardians, and community members so that the core safety strategies can be reenforced at home.
- **Take Home Activities (6-8)** – a set of activities for students in grades 6-8 that can be shared with parents, guardians, and community members so that the core safety strategies can be reenforced at home.
- **Take Home Activities (9-12)** – a set of activities for students in grades 9-12 that can be shared with parents, guardians, and community members so that the core safety strategies can be reenforced at home.
- **Sample Opt-Out Language** – we know that there may be reasons why some families are apprehensive about this program and want to give them an opportunity to opt-out of they choose.

Glossary

- **Age and Ability** refers to the key metrics for determining developmentally appropriateness for training. This approach considers both chronological age and individual abilities—including cognitive, communication, mobility, and mental well-being factors—to select the appropriate starting point for instruction.
 - **Early:** Pre-school to Kindergarten; students in this group typically have a basic understanding of danger, can practice simple safety options, understand and use basic language, and rely on adults for guidance.
 - **Developing:** 1st–2nd grade; these students possess all the “Early” characteristics of safety awareness and, with more experience in school, are generally capable of providing basic assistance during an emergency.
 - **Practiced:** Usually upper elementary (3rd–5th grade); students demonstrate the traits of the “Developing” stage and are able to assist an adult in emergencies, such as closing a door.
 - **Proficient:** Middle schoolers (5th/6th–8th grade); these students have acquired the skills from the “Practiced” stage and, due to their school experience, can perform emergency tasks independently, without direct adult commands. At this level, more advanced language such as “Avoid,” “Deny,” and “Disrupt” can be introduced, though they may or may not be able to disrupt an attacker.
 - **Independent:** High school students and many adults; individuals in this category possess “Proficient” skills and can independently apply and adapt safety knowledge to various situations. They may or may not be able to disrupt an attacker.
 - **Advanced:** School staff who serve students’ needs; these individuals have been trained in their safety roles and responsibilities and demonstrate “Independent” awareness. They are capable of leading others during emergencies and may or may not be able to disrupt an attacker.

- **Professional:** Safety professionals; these are highly trained individuals equipped to provide tactical responses and countermeasures to protect lives during a crisis or emergency.
- **Avoid** refers to actions taken when an area becomes unsafe. This involves identifying primary and secondary exit routes and considering alternative evacuation options, such as windows or emergency exits. For younger students, use the term “Get Out,” while “Avoid” is appropriate for older students and adults.
- **CRASE (Civilian Response to Active Shooter Events)** was developed by Texas State University’s Advanced Law Enforcement Rapid Response Training (ALERTT) program to equip civilians with practical strategies for responding to active shooter incidents. Its core principles emphasize immediate, decisive actions to maximize safety and survival until law enforcement arrives. The *Staying Safe* program adapts these principles to provide students with a menu of safety options tailored to various school environments.
- **Deny** refers to actions taken upon learning of a safety threat outside the classroom or designated area. The objective is to prevent unauthorized entry by locking doors, barricading, or otherwise blocking access. For younger students, this concept is simplified as “Keep Out,” while older students and adults use the term “Deny.”
- **Disrupt** refers to deliberate actions taken as a last resort when avoidance and denial are no longer possible. This option is highly situational and personal, involving any behavior that interrupts, distracts, or impedes an aggressor’s actions. Examples include making loud noises, throwing objects, or taking defensive or offensive measures to prevent further harm. There are no set rules for disruption; the primary goal is to create enough disorder to stop or slow the threat.
- **Decisive Moment** refers to the critical point during a disaster when an individual commits to purposeful action under pressure. This phase marks the transition from hesitation to decisive, intentional response.
- **Deliberation** refers to Amanda Ripley’s second stage of response during disasters. In crisis situations, individuals shift from analytical thinking to instinctive survival responses—fight, flight, freeze, or follow (looking to others to decide what to do next). To ensure sound decision-making, it is essential to maintain rational thought as long as possible. The *Staying Safe* program offers strategies to help individuals remain focused and make effective choices in high-pressure scenarios.

- **Denial**, as identified by Amanda Ripley, is the first stage people experience when disaster strikes. During emergencies, this mental state causes individuals to minimize or rationalize warning signs, delaying critical action. Such hesitation can waste precious seconds that are vital for ensuring personal safety.
- **The Hierarchy of Teaching and Learning** is a trauma-informed framework designed to empower students and adults to take effective action during a crisis. Visually represented as a triangle, this model uses a scaffolded approach, ensuring each level builds upon the last to develop confidence and competence without inducing unnecessary fear. The focus each level of the hierarchy are:
 - **Foundational Knowledge (Base):** The base of the triangle focuses on building situational awareness. This includes introducing core safety concepts, key safety adults, and orienting individuals to their physical environment.
 - **Skill Development (Lower Middle):** This level is dedicated to direct instruction on specific safety skills, actions, and plans. To be effective, this learning is integrated into the school day through various methods.
 - **Practical Application & Drills (Upper Middle):** Moving up, the focus shifts to practicing learned skills through drills like evacuations (fire drills) and lockdowns. This stage requires careful, trauma-informed consideration of best practices, such as the appropriate use of announced versus unannounced drills.
 - **Advanced Simulation (Top):** The top of the triangle represents advanced, high-intensity simulations. These exercises are reserved exclusively for professional staff and first responders and do not involve students.
- **Normalcy bias** is the brain's tendency to interpret unfamiliar events as familiar ones, such as mistaking gunshots for fireworks.
- **Social proof** describes how people look to others for cues in uncertain situations—if a few respond correctly in an emergency, others are likely to follow, increasing the chance of saving lives.
- **The Step-by-Step Teaching Progression** outlines how to introduce and build students' *Staying Safe* skills:

- **Introduce (“I do”):** The teacher models and explains concepts, demonstrating safe behaviors.
- **Explore (“We do”):** Teacher and students collaboratively engage in activities to deepen understanding.
- **Practice (“You do”):** Students practice skills under adult guidance and supervision.
- **Follow Up:** Regular review and extension activities reinforce learning, fostering independence and confidence.

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Supplemental Resources and Programs



Especially Safe®
A Safe and Sound Program

AN INCLUSIVE APPROACH TO SAFETY



Our program to help safety planning teams address the safety and security needs of all members of the community. Learn more about the program and how you can plan and prepare and teach and train to meet the special needs of students, staff, and visitors in your school community – from developmental disabilities to communication challenges, medical needs to mobility challenges, and more.



**Pathways for
Prevention of
School Violence®**
A Safe and Sound Program

CHANGING THE TRAJECTORY



The Pathways for Prevention program provides a practical approach to school violence prevention. Participants will explore universal violence prevention strategies, as well as targeted and intensive interventions for preventing and responding to violent behaviors to support safe and sound learning environments.



Bright Futures

A Safe and Sound Program

CONNECTING COMMUNITIES & CLASSROOMS



The Bright Futures Program at Safe and Sound Schools brings together community partners in partnership with families and schools for a shared purpose: to quickly meet basic needs and create new opportunities for children and youth so they can succeed in school and beyond.



Averted School Violence Project

A Safe and Sound Program

DATA-DRIVEN VIOLENCE PREVENTION



The Averted School Violence (ASV) database houses hundreds of cases of averted incidents, lives saved, and lessons learned in prevention. Join our mission to improve school safety and prevent future violence by anonymously and securely submitting an averted incident for review.

Bring a Safe and Sound Training to Your School or District!

Our expert team is dedicated to empowering school safety stakeholders across the U.S. and beyond with training and tailored consulting. If none of our existing programs are the perfect fit, we also offer customized consulting to help you strengthen your school safety efforts.



Visit our [website](#) to learn more and fill out the form at the bottom of the page to get in touch!



www.safeandsoundschools.org