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# ***Transforming School Climate Mindsets and Ecosystems***

## **Session 2a - Reducing Stress and Trauma by Normalizing School Safety Practices**

**February 29, 2024**



# California Center for School Climate (CCSC)

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## What we offer

- School Climate Data Use Webinar Series
- Virtual Learning Sessions
- Professional Learning
- Resources
  - briefs, tools, audio gallery
- Technical Assistance and Coaching Supports





# Speakers



Shawna White, Senior Lead in School Safety, WestEd's Justice and Prevention Research Center



Jeff Caldwell, Senior Lead in School Safety, WestEd's Justice and Prevention Research Center



# Reducing Stress and Trauma by Normalizing School Safety Practices



February 2024



# The purpose of a safety drill...

- To build muscle memory
- Practice response actions for different types of emergencies in a low-pressure manner
- Create opportunity to test procedures and adjust as needed

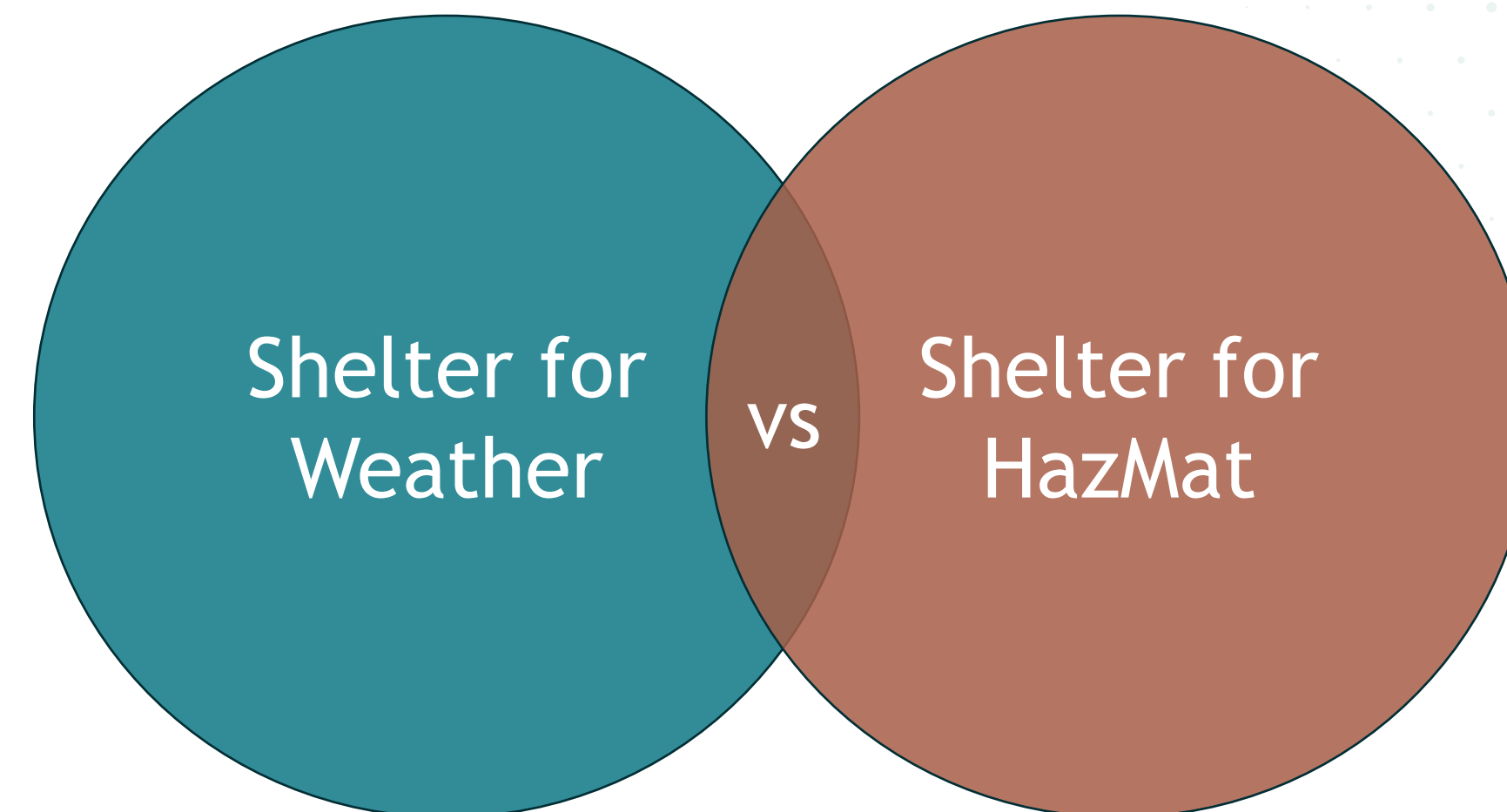
*“The primary objective of a drill is for participants to build muscle memory and practice an action to use in various events or situations.”*

*— I Love U Guys Foundation*



# Should a school safety drill be conducted using an emergency scenario?

Scenarios can be used to contextualize a drill and enhance understanding:





# Drills and Exercises...

## Drills:

- Low pressure
- Ways to practice actions

## Exercises:

- Range from tabletop scenarios up to functional exercises
- Functional exercises are not necessary to learn the basic actions for emergency response

*“...exercises should be appropriate to the participants’ developmental level and physical abilities.*

*Regular practice, using a nonsensorial approach, helps participants develop readiness and quickly access and apply knowledge, while reducing the potential of trauma impact.”*

*— NASP, NASRO, & Safe and Sound Schools*



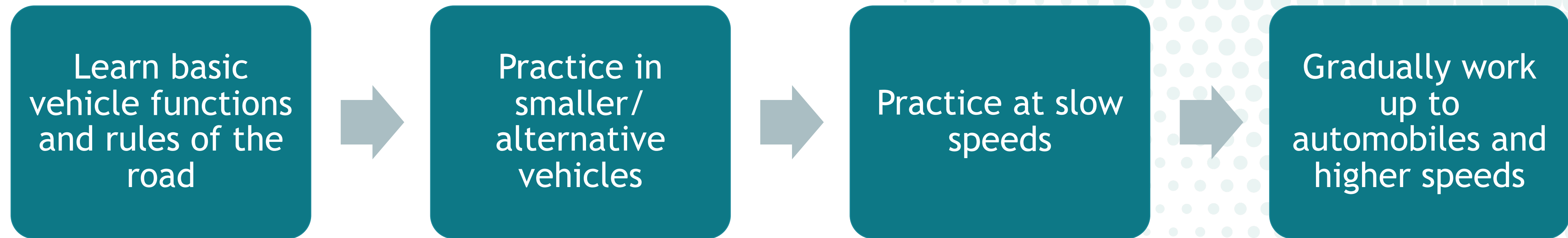


The exact nature of these drills vary, but some are so realistic they involve a simulated shooter who stalks the hall, checking classroom doors, listening for any noise that may indicate the presence of students.”

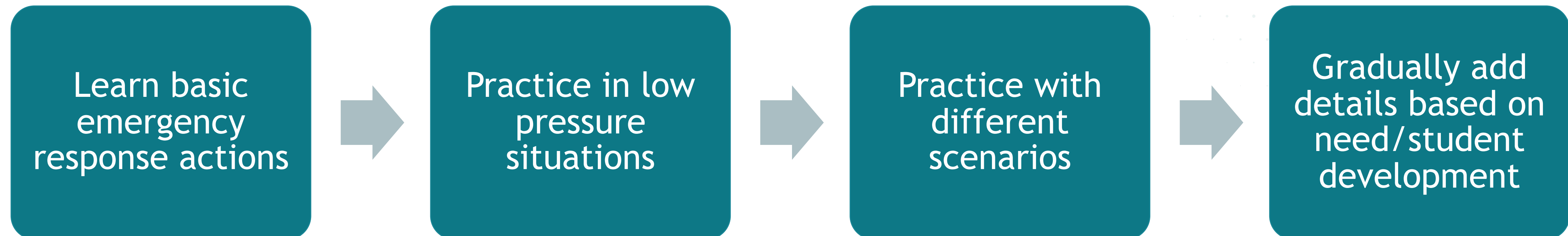
— American Psychiatric Association Foundation



# Learning to Drive



# Learning Emergency Responses





# Expanding a basic drill without traumatizing participants...

- Use a hybrid approach between basic drill and more advanced exercise
- Add additional challenges without moving into a functional exercise
- Fire drill example: use a scenario that assumes the primary evacuation route is blocked, requiring evacuation using a secondary route





## Keep Explanations Developmentally Appropriate

Early elementary school

- Brief, simple information balanced with reassurances that schools and homes are safe

Upper elementary and early middle school

- More vocal in asking questions
- May need assistance separating reality from fantasy

Upper middle school and high school

- Strong and varying opinions
- Will share concrete suggestions
- Can have a role in maintaining safe schools

— National Association of School Psychologists





**It is critical that participation in drills be appropriate to developmental level and physical abilities, and take into consideration prior traumatic experiences, special needs, and temperaments.”**

— National Association of School Psychologists



# Reducing stress and trauma around drills...

- Make emergency response actions more routine
- Build response actions into daily school activities to normalize those actions
- Routine practice of response actions builds familiarity and readiness to carry out drills in a less stressful manner
- Ultimately, increased familiarity and readiness for drills results in more effective responses to actual emergencies

*“The otherwise simple task of locking the classroom door may become extremely difficult for a teacher who has just heard a Lockdown order. Elevated adrenaline levels may result in the loss of fine motor skills, which can impede an act as normal as inserting a key to lock a door.”*

*— I Love U Guys Foundation*



# Example strategies inside the classroom...

- For younger students:
  - Plan classroom layout ahead of time so story time rug is out of the line of sight
  - Story time rug becomes the classroom safe spot used for lockdown drills
  - Occasionally change instructions from moving to that area for story time, to moving to that area for quiet time
  - Normalizes moving to the safe spot and sitting quietly to practice response actions required during a lockdown

*“As part of the initial planning process for crisis preparedness, schools should identify how to integrate and reinforce the concepts taught during the drills.”*

*— NASP, NASRO, & Safe and Sound Schools*



# Example strategies inside the classroom...

- For older students:
  - Hold more in-depth conversations with students about why we conduct safety drills
  - Emphasize what works
  - Empower students by focusing on actions they can take to keep themselves safe and contribute to overall school safety
  - Build self-efficacy by involving students, as appropriate, in implementing drills

*“Talk about steps children and youth can take to make a positive difference. The ability to take action, even in small ways, can help reduce anxiety and promote resilience.”*

*— National Association of School Psychologists*



# Example strategies outside the classroom...

- Walk your primary and secondary evacuation routes as routes to other common locations, such as the gym, cafeteria, or library
- Incorporate emergency response concepts into other instruction, such as creating extra credit questions on assignments
- Get creative! Develop activities such as scavenger hunts for AED units.

*“Regular practice, using a nonsensorial approach, helps participants develop readiness and quickly access and apply knowledge, while reducing the potential of trauma impact. ”*

*– NASP, NASRO, & Safe and Sound Schools*





**The threat perceptions of children are typically based on adult behavior, so effective drills include the presence of staff who inspire calm and confidence in students. When adults are well-trained and stay calm, the students are more likely to follow and gain confidence and ability.”**

— NASP, NASRO, & Safe and Sound Schools





**Review attendance to determine if any students did not come to school to avoid the drill. Make a plan for how they can participate next time.”**

— The National Child Traumatic Stress Network





**Conduct informational meetings so parents can ask questions about emergency plans and drills. Allow plenty of time for discussion, engagement, clarification, and reassurance... Discuss coping strategies parents can use for themselves and their families, so parents can practice and reinforce adaptive coping at home.”**

— The National Child Traumatic Stress Network





**Identify staff whose role will be to observe student and staff reactions. Have additional staff available to provide immediate support for students and/or staff having strong emotional reactions during the drill.”**

— The National Child Traumatic Stress Network



**Schools should not use simulation techniques with students, and exercises should be appropriate to the participants’ developmental level and physical abilities.”**

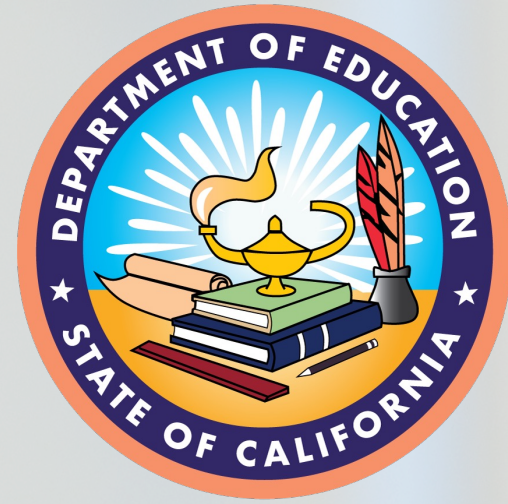
— NASP, NASRO, & Safe and Sound Schools



# A few resources... many more are embedded within those listed

- [Best Practice Considerations for Armed Assailant Drills in Schools](#)
- [Creating School Active Shooter/Intruder Drills](#)
- [Mitigating Psychological Effects of Lockdowns](#)
- [Operational Guidance for Implementing the Standard Response Protocol in a K12 Environment](#)
- [Talking to Children About Violence: Tips for Families and Educators](#)





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# Q&A

**Please share your questions by using the Q&A feature in the Zoom toolbar.**



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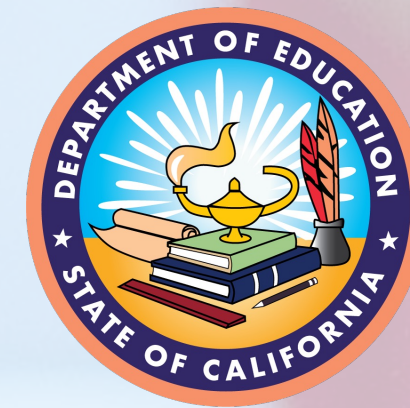
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**Thank you for joining us.**