

Inclusive School Emergency Plans for Students with Cognitive and Sensory Needs

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BACKGROUND

In 2017, approximately 63% of students served under the Individual with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) spent 80% of their time in a regular classroom (U.S. Department of Education, 2020).

Common disabilities under the IDEA were specific learning disabilities, speech or language impairments, autism, and intellectual disability (U.S. Department of Education, 2020).

Most states offer guidelines specifying a comprehensive plan for the frequency and type of emergency drills schools must conduct, but few offer safety considerations for students with disabilities (Asher & Pollak, 2009).

Nebraska Department of Education (2016) does not require but recommends schools develop Standard Response Procedures for students with functional needs.

While most schools are recommended to establish safety procedures for students with disabilities, many schools continue to lack or have inadequate plans due to lack of a formal model for establishing such procedures (Clarke, Embury, Jones, & Yssel, 2014).

St. Pius X/ St. Leo is a private school in Omaha partnered with the Madonna School to provide inclusive special education, as of 2019. The program did not have specified safety procedures for students with disabilities.

PROGRAM DETAILS

Development of

- A guide for selecting and implementing supports for students with cognitive and/or sensory processing impairments
- Individual Evacuation and Lockdown Plan (IELP) template (adapted from Asher & Pollak, 2009; Clarke, Embury, Jones, & Yssel, 2014)

FOCUSED QUESTION

What is the evidenced-based strategies and variables to consider when developing emergency/evacuation procedures for students with cognitive and/or sensory impairments to increase participation in emergency evacuation and lockdowns?

Individual Evacuation and Lockdown Plan (IELP)	
Student:	
Teacher(s):	
Classroom:	
Parent(s):	
Date:	
Student Needs & Supports	
Student Strengths that may aid in a crisis	
Medical Needs	
Communication Needs	
Sensory Needs	
Other Needs	
Emergency Kit	Yes/No. If yes, location(s): Includes:

PROCESS

- Literature review of scholarly articles was conducted for best practices on teaching safety skills and creating an emergency plan for individuals with disabilities.
 - Databases searched: CINAHL, Google Scholar, Springer, Education Sources.
 - Inclusion criteria: Level I-IV research, written in English, and peer reviewed within the last 10 years. Study participants were under the age of 21 and had a disability of ASD, Down syndrome, intellectual disability, or developmental disability. Intervention was strategies for emergency preparedness. Outcome was fire safety, emergency preparedness, evacuation, or safety skills.
 - Exclusion criteria: Level V research. Articles appraised within systematic review or meta-analysis selected for this review. Participants who were above age 21, and/or had no identified cognitive or sensory disability. Interventions and outcomes other than inclusion criteria.
- Ten articles yielded; four selected for review.
- Searched and reviewed eight published public school and two national emergency guides and suggestions for individuals with disabilities via Google Scholar.
- Conducted three, thirty-minute interviews with administration and special education faculty at St. Pius X/St. Leo School regarding current safety practices and concerns for students with disabilities.

Adapted Evacuation and Lockdown Plan			
Location	Plan	Adult Assistance	Backup
Homeroom	Evacuation:		
	Lockdown:		
Cafeteria	Evacuation:		
	Lockdown:		
Recess	Evacuation:		
	Lockdown:		
Bathroom	Evacuation:		
	Lockdown:		
Hallway	Evacuation:		
	Lockdown:		
Gym/Assembly	Evacuation:		
	Lockdown:		
Art	Evacuation:		
	Lockdown:		
Music	Evacuation:		
	Lockdown:		
Library	Evacuation:		
	Lockdown:		
Computer lab	Evacuation:		
	Lockdown:		
Bus plan Yes/ No			

Signature _____ Date _____ Signature _____ Date _____

RESULTS

- A total of four articles were analyzed, yielding primary themes:
 - Emotional response impacts physical abilities (Clarke, Embury, Jones, & Yssel, 2014; Dixon, Bergstrom, Smith, & Tarbox, 2010; Garcia, Dukes, Brady, Scott, & Wilson, 2016).
 - Recommended developing a documented plan with students' strengths and needs for evacuation and lockdown (Asher & Pollak, 2009; Clarke, Embury, Jones, & Yssel, 2014; National Fire Protection Association, 2009).
 - Most effective strategies for cognitive disabilities involved rehearsal with cueing, reinforcements, video modeling, and use of role playing (Dixon, Bergstrom, Smith, & Tarbox, 2010; Garcia, Dukes, Brady, Scott, & Wilson, 2016).
 - Recommendation to work on remaining silent for lockdown situations (Clarke, Embury, Jones, & Yssel, 2014).
 - For sensory and emotional regulation, recommend use of peer buddy, to go bag with preferred activities, and visual supports such as a social story (Clarke, Embury, Jones, & Yssel, 2014).
- Result: Development of an inclusive school emergency preparedness guide and Individual Evacuation and Lockdown Plan (IELP) template. Guide had literature search results, sections for each sensory need, section on active shooter preparation, what to consider of the IELP/how to make it successful, and other safety resources.

BOTTOM LINE FOR OT

Occupational therapists are uniquely positioned to improve emergency preparedness for students with cognitive and/or sensory needs through the evaluation of abilities and performance in safety drills. Therapists should participate in safety planning and collaborate with educators on how to support these students in emergencies through the development of an IELP. Literature on cognitive and sensory impairments is sparse as it mostly addresses physical disabilities. More research is needed on how to teach and generalize safety skills.

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