

Talking with your kids about school safety

Oregon statute states that “all schools are required to instruct and drill students on emergency procedures so that the students can respond to an emergency without confusion or panic. The emergency procedures shall include drills and instruction on fires, earthquakes, and *safety threats*.”

In 2011, Oregon Trail School District adopted the Homeland Security Run, Hide, Fight protocols to be implemented as needed during a school safety threat. All OTSD staff is trained to protect students by using the protocols during an active shooter or other dangerous intruder incident.

Each fall, students in every Oregon Trail classroom, K-12, spend time learning the Run, Hide, Fight protocols and the actions to take when there is a threat to safety at their school. We encourage you to talk with your child about what they learned in class, and ask them if they have any questions or concerns. The exercise of talking through where they would go and what they would do gives kids some perspective they can draw on in a true crisis situation.

Run Hide Fight protocols urge students to:

- Run when it is safe to run
- Hide where it is safe to hide
- Fight if you have no other options

Psychology Today, Steve Albrecht, D.B.A.

District-produced Run, Hide, Fight videos are used to start the classroom discussion – a K-5 video and a 6-12 video. You may view the videos at: oregontrailschools.com/run-hide-fight/. During the classroom presentation, teachers convey to students that schools are one of the safest places to be and it is unlikely we will ever need to implement these protocols. But if it becomes necessary, we are going to do what is needed to protect them.

The messages your child hear include:

RUN

- Listen and follow your teacher’s directions
- If you can run away to avoid the shooter, do so
- Run to any safe area. This may mean running off campus to a nearby home or business
- Call 911 when safe to do so

HIDE

- Your teacher may tell you to hide in a safe area
- Stay quiet once you are hidden
- Do not leave your safe area until a safe adult tells you to

FIGHT

- Fighting back is a last resort
- Try to escape
- Throw objects to startle the shooter, running away as you throw
- Run to a safe area

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The National Mental Health Association offers the following suggestions when talking with your children about school violence:

Encourage children to talk about their concerns and to express their feelings. Some children may be hesitant to initiate such conversation, so you may want to prompt them by asking if they feel safe at school. When talking with younger children remember to talk on their level. For example, they may not understand the term “violence” but can talk to you about being afraid or a classmate who is mean to them.

Talk honestly about your own feelings regarding school violence. It is important for children to recognize they are not dealing with their fears alone.

Validate the child’s feelings. Do not minimize a child’s concerns. Let him/her know that serious school violence is not common, which is why these incidents attract so much media attention. Stress that schools are safe places. In fact, recent studies have shown that schools are more secure now than ever before.

Empower children to take action regarding school safety. Encourage them to report specific incidents (such as bullying, threats or talk of suicide) and to develop problem solving and conflict resolution skills.

Discuss the safety procedures that are in place at your child’s school. Explain why visitors sign in at the school office or certain doors remain locked during the school day. Help your child understand that such precautions are in place to ensure his or her safety, and stress the importance of adhering to school rules and policies.

Create safety plans with your child. Help identify which adults your child can talk to if they feel threatened at school.



Oregon Trail staff learn to protect students from an active shooter.

For more information about Oregon Trail School District’s Emergency Operations Plan, contact Julia Monteith at 503-668-0679, julia.monteith@ortrail.k12.or.us.