

Schools are often regarded as some of the safest places in our communities. Yet, the reality is that emergencies can happen anywhere, at any time.

In every emergency, our top priority is the safety of students and staff. To ensure an effective response to any school crisis, East Central Alberta Catholic Schools has developed a comprehensive Emergency Response Plan. This plan aligns with other local emergency plans, recognizing that a school emergency may require the involvement of multiple agencies.

Each school maintains its own on-site emergency response team, support by a Division-based Emergency Response Team when needed. Plans for both individual schools and the Division as a whole are reviewed annually and after every emergency. Staff are regularly trained in emergency procedures, and schools conduct drills to reinforce preparedness.

While standardized protocols provide the foundation of our response, the specifics of each incident guide our actions. Above all, our primary commitment is to safeguarding the well-being of students and staff.

Collaboration with local emergency services is crucial to our planning. Our Division's plans operate in full cooperation with law enforcement, fire, and EMS, without overriding their authority.

For security reasons, certain details of our emergency response plans cannot be shared publicly. However, this guide highlights the key elements and addresses questions parents frequently ask about emergency preparedness.

We thank you for your support and partnership in helping us maintain safe schools.

Yours in Christ,
Jim Taplin
Superintendent

KEEPING SAFE AT SCHOOL

When a school is faced with an emergency, the Incident Commander (usually the principal) will assess the situation and implement the appropriate emergency protocol. The emergency protocols are listed below. In addition to the procedures described below, schools also practice protocols such as "Drop-Cover-Hold," a method of protecting vital body parts during some natural disasters and conduct fire drills. All staff and students are required to participate in these drills.

Lock-Down



Lock-down is used when there is a threat or potential threat of violence to students and/or staff **INSIDE** the school. During a Lock-Down all doors to and within the school are locked. No one is permitted in or out of any area once it has been locked. Students and staff must respond very quickly to a Lock-Down command to get to a safe location before doors are locked. **No one, other than law enforcement, is permitted access to the building until the Lock-down is over.**

Hold and Secure



Hold and secure is used when there is a threat or potential threat of violence to students and/or staff **OUTSIDE** the school. During a Hold and Secure, all entrance doors to the school are locked, with no one permitted in or out of the building. Movement is permitted inside the school, and inside activities can continue. **No one, other than law enforcement, is permitted access to the building until the Hold and Secure has been cleared.**

Shelter-in-Place



Shelter-in-Place is used when there is **NO THREAT OF VIOLENCE** but directing and controlling movement inside the school is prudent. A Shelter-in-Place may be called for any of the following reasons: an environmental emergency, severe weather, student or staff requiring first aid/medical/focused attention. During a Shelter-in-Place, students and staff retreat to classrooms/safe zones to seek shelter or simply clear the hallways, allowing for both privacy of a student requiring attention and unrestricted access for emergency responders. This protocol may or may not include having students or staff who are outdoors come back into the school. Doors are not locked during this protocol. **Students will not be released or dismissed until the situation has been resolved.**

Evacuation



Evacuation is used when there is possible danger **INSIDE** the school (with no threat of violence) and it is safer to be outside the school than inside (e.g., fire, gas leak). This may mean only going outside and away from the building until it is safe to re-enter the school. In other cases, students and staff may need to go to an evacuation centre. Parents will be informed of the alternate location through the school's Crisis Notification Network.

Dismissal

If necessary, a Controlled Student Release Procedure will be used to release students to an authorized emergency contact.

WHEN AN EMERGENCY OCCURS

Although your natural instincts in an emergency may be to go to the school to safeguard your child, please understand that doing so could impede the response to the situation. Going to the school may interfere with emergency crews' and school personnel's efforts to deal with the emergency. Extra vehicles and people at the site make the task more difficult. Please follow the instructions provided to you through the communications channels outlined below. **Please do not go to the school to pick up your child unless requested to do so.**

If you arrive at the school in the midst of an emergency, please respect the protocol in progress. While we understand personnel circumstances or initial reactions might move you to do something contrary to the school's established procedures, we cannot compromise the safety of students or staff to accommodate individual requests that could put anyone at risk.

Please DO NOT CALL THE SCHOOL and DO NOT CALL YOUR CHILD'S CELL PHONE.

- Phone systems need to remain available for handling the actual emergency.
- Overloading the system may mean the school cannot communicate with first responders.
- Calling your child's cell phone during an emergency maybe putting them at higher risk by disclosing their location or drawing attention to them during a lock-down.

KEEPING INFORMED DURING AN EMERGENCY

During an emergency, it is unlikely you will be able to reach the school by phone. We will, however, make every effort to contact parents **directly** or by one of the methods noted below.

Crisis Notification Network

Parents will be alerted to emergency situations via our **BrightArrow** notification system. In order to receive these notifications, please ensure your contact information is up-to-date at your school.

Website, Social Media

When appropriate, the District will also keep parents informed by posting information regarding the emergency on the District website. We may also add information to social media.

CONTROLLED STUDENT RELEASE PROCEDURE

We want to recognize that when an emergency occurs, parents will be worried and want to be reunited with their child as quickly as possible. It is our intention to make this happen. However, to ensure every child's safety and the safety of staff, specific procedures have been established for releasing students.

Parents are asked to adhere to the parent-child reunification procedures listed here. Staff will work hard to ensure these procedures take place without delay. However, please understand the process will still take some time; we ask for your patience when you arrive at the Parent-Child Reunion Area.

Parent-Child Reunion Procedures

1. **A Parent-Child Reunion Area will be established.** Parents will be notified at the time of the emergency of the Reunion Area's location. The location may not be at the school – the location will depend on the specifics of the emergency.
2. **You will be required to fill out a Student Release Request Form.** This ensures all students are accounted for at all times and students are only released to authorized individuals.
3. **Students will only be released to an individual designated as legal guardian or emergency contact** on the Demographic Update Form. This form is sent out each year by your local school. It is important to keep this information current as the school will only release a child to someone listed as an Emergency Contact – there will be no exceptions.
4. **Valid identification is required to pick up your child.** This is required to protect your child from any unauthorized individuals attempting to pick up students. Even if school personnel know you, you must still present I.D. as the school may be receiving assistance from other schools or outside agencies.
5. **You will be required to sign for the release of your child.** This is extremely important, as it ensures your child, along with other students, is accounted for at all times. Please do not just take your child from the school or evacuation center without signing for his/her release.
6. **Once you have been reunited with your child, please leave the area immediately.** This is for your own safety and that of your child.

If you are unable to pick up your child, he/she will be kept at the Parent-Child Reunion Center until alternative arrangements can be made. Your child will be supervised at all times.

Together with home and church, we respond to the needs of each student by providing quality learning experiences rooted in our Catholic faith.