

LOCKOUT VS. LOCKDOWN: ARE WE PUTTING OUR CHILDREN AT RISK?

A simple internet search disclosed that there were over 40 school gun incidents in 2016, many resulting in injury or death to over 30 innocent individuals. Additionally, there were numerous incidents where it was reported that school campuses were placed in Lockdown because of potential threats in the immediate neighborhood. These Lockdown situations for threats in the surrounding neighborhood of our schools are reported regularly in the news media.



The fact that a real threat exists to our schools and our children is indisputable, but how we react to these threats is critically important in mitigating these threats and preventing further harm. In my career, I have conducted emergency readiness assessments at both elementary and high-schools and have unfortunately found that most were ill-informed and ill-prepared to deal with these situations.

In the first paragraph, I describe two very different threats that have typically resulted in one mode of response: "LOCKDOWN". The two different threats demand two different responses. After an incident involving the death of their child, the child's parents formed a foundation named "I Love You Guys" to help schools better develop emergency response plans. In their Standard Response Protocol (SRP), they clearly address the difference between these two response protocols as follows:

*"The differentiation between Lockout and Lockdown is a critical element in SRP. A Lockout recovers all students from outside the building, secures the building perimeter and locks all outside doors. **This would be implemented when there is a threat or hazard outside of the building.** Criminal activity, dangerous events in the community, or even a vicious dog on the playground would be examples of a Lockout response. While the Lockout response encourages greater staff situational awareness, it allows for educational practices to continue with little classroom interruption or distraction.*

Lockdown is a classroom-based protocol that requires locking the classroom door, turning off the lights and placing students out of sight of any corridor windows. Student action during Lockdown is to remain quiet. It does not mandate locking outside doors. There are several reasons for not locking perimeter doors during a Lockdown. Risk is increased to students or staff in exposed areas attempting to lock outside doors. Locking outside doors inhibits entry of first responders and increases risk as responders attempt to breach doors."

Lockdown is initiated when the threat is within the facility to minimize further intrusion by the perpetrator or harm to other persons within the building.

Lockout is a procedure designed to maintain operations as close to normal as possible until the exterior threat is removed whereas Lockdown is intended to cause a cease in normal operations and place all persons in a controlled environment, i.e. locked and secured classroom. In a typical Lockdown protocol all teachers and children return to their classrooms, lock the classroom door

from the inside, turn off the lights and huddle in a corner until the all-clear is given. This is a very traumatic situation to the students, the faculty, and the administration. Therefore, it should not be implemented inappropriately.

Lockdown on the other hand is intended to reduce stress by reducing disruption and to the extent possible maintaining normal operations.

So, when I ask above, “Are we putting our children at risk?”; I’m asking does implementation of the wrong response add to the risk by heightening the emotions of the children and the stress/confusion of the faculty and parents. Parents who hear that the child’s school has been placed in Lockdown try to immediately respond to the location which can result in driving dangerously and acting hysterically. This further exacerbates the level of stress and the potential danger because of the improper activation of Lockdown.

Initiating the proper response is a matter of training and coordination between schools and local emergency service providers. I have had school clients report to me that their office had been contacted by local police and told to put the school in Lockdown because of a threat in the neighborhood. As indicated, this is the wrong advice and the wrong response.

Further, this confusion of terms has resulted in mistakes by school administrators in establishing their own response procedures. While assessing one private K-12 school, I witnessed their Lockdown drill. When the drill was begun there were children in the playground and not in the building. The teachers had been trained, mostly because they only had one protocol “Lockdown”, to bring the children back into the building and into their respective classrooms. In a real “Active Shooter” situation, this would bring the children who are safely outside the building back into the danger zone. The appropriate response should have been to move them safely and quietly to an off-campus location.

The I Love You Guys Foundation has available online suggested response protocols for use by all schools, institutions, and businesses in developing their own documentation and training programs. (See iloveyouguyss.org.) This would be a good place to start for our schools, communities, and law enforcement agencies to attain a better understanding of this critical issue and ensure that we are all operating in a consistent and correct fashion to these real threats.

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