



# HIGHLAND FALLS-FORT MONTGOMERY CENTRAL SCHOOL DISTRICT

## Parent Guide to Emergency Response

The Highland Falls Fort Montgomery Central School District prioritizes the safety and welfare of our students and staff above all else. Our objective is to ensure that every individual within our school communities is equipped to handle any potential situation. To uphold a safe environment, and in accordance with state law, it is essential that we conduct drills to practice our emergency and crisis response plans. These drills enhance our capacity to safeguard students, minimize injuries, and save lives. Furthermore, they provide an opportunity to assess our emergency operations plan and refine our response strategies for various scenarios.

Emergency response plans are established at each school to ensure a timely and effective response to any incidents. Each school has a dedicated Safety Committee responsible for overseeing the implementation and management of these plans. Committee members have clearly defined roles and responsibilities in the event of an emergency. Regular meetings are held to review procedures, and annual training sessions and drills are conducted to ensure that both students and staff are familiar with the safest and most effective emergency response strategies.

### Safety is the Priority

The HFFMCSD is dedicated to ensuring a safe environment for both students and staff. We collaborate closely with local and state agencies, including law enforcement, fire departments, emergency medical services, and public health officials, to ensure our preparedness and the safety of our students.

In the event of an emergency, please rest assured that our primary focus will be to protect children first and then provide you with information as promptly and accurately as possible.

Effective communication with parents during an emergency is a critical priority for our district. We appreciate your patience and understanding if we are unable to respond as quickly as you may prefer. The safety of your child, along with that of other students and staff, remains our foremost priority.

### What is an Emergency?

An emergency refers to unforeseen events and rapidly evolving circumstances. We are trained to address a variety of issues, whether they arise from natural occurrences or human actions. However, it is difficult to predict our exact response to any specific situation in advance.

As a general guideline, please be assured that our primary objective is to ensure the safety of the children, followed by providing you with timely updates.

If a situation escalates to the point where you need to evacuate your home or workplace, we will either instruct you to pick up your child at their school, or we will direct you to a designated safe location where we can provide you with the latest information and facilitate reunification with your child.

### Preparing for a School Emergency

-Please ensure that your child's emergency contact information is current, including alternative phone numbers where we can reach you and any family or friends you have designated as backup contacts. If there are any changes to this information, please notify the school promptly.

-Discuss with your children the importance of following instructions during an emergency.

-Instruct your children not to use their cell phones unless explicitly permitted. Unauthorized use of cell phones could jeopardize safety during an emergency and may distract students from receiving critical safety instructions.

-Develop an emergency plan and ensure that your children are familiar with its details.



## District Wide Terminology Used for Emergency Response

### **HOLD**

A "hold" procedure is implemented to restrict the movement of students and staff during short-term emergencies. The purpose of this procedure is to ensure the safety of everyone by keeping them out of the affected area until the situation is resolved. Typically, students and staff will remain in their current locations until the hold in place is officially lifted. For instance, a "hold" may be enacted in situations such as an altercation in a hallway, a maintenance issue within the building, or a medical emergency.

### **LOCKDOWN**

A "lockdown" is implemented when a school administrator, faculty member, or staff member identifies a real or imminent threat occurring in or around the school. The primary goal of a "lockdown" is to ensure the safety of students, staff, and visitors by securing them in locked rooms, away from the immediate danger. Individuals will remain in these secure locations until the situation is resolved by emergency responders or law enforcement personnel.

### **SHELTER**

In the event that a "shelter" order is issued, students and staff are required to remain indoors for their safety, which may be for an extended duration. This measure is taken because staying inside the building is deemed safer than being outside. Depending on the nature of the threat or hazard, it may be necessary for students and staff to relocate to interior rooms or spaces without windows. For instance, a "shelter" may be enacted during a severe weather emergency.

### **SECURE LOCKOUT**

A "secure lockout" is implemented in response to an actual or perceived threat to student safety in the vicinity of the school. During a "secure lockout", students and staff continue with the regular school schedule; however, individuals are not permitted to go outdoors, and entry is restricted to authorized personnel only. A "secure lockout" may be initiated upon receiving reports of criminal activity in the nearby area or sightings of a dangerous animal outside the school premises.

### **EVACUATE**

An "evacuation" is initiated to safely remove students and staff from the building. Each school has established procedures for evacuation, which are commonly practiced during evacuation drills. In the event that students need to be transported to an off-site location, parents will receive instructions regarding where they can collect their children. A formal reunification process will be implemented to ensure that students are released only to authorized parents or emergency contacts.

### **REUNIFICATION**

"Reunification" is a structured procedure that is activated following a significant incident. The objective of this process is to systematically reconnect students with their parents or legal guardians. While it may require an extended duration to complete, this process ensures that staff and safety personnel can account for all individuals involved.

## **What to do During a School Emergency**

- Refrain from going to the school or the scene of an emergency until you are specifically requested to do so by officials. While it is natural to want to be present as a parent, your presence may hinder the emergency response efforts.
- Check the district website at [hffmcsd.org](http://hffmcsd.org) and actively monitor your phone for updates.
- Do not listen to rumors. If your child reaches out to you, keep in mind that they may only possess limited information about the overall situation.
- It is important to stay as calm as possible when your child contacts you, as they may be seeking reassurance.