

 parents

(<https://www.cbc.ca/parents/>)



The Monster My Daughter Fears Isn't An Active Shooter, But The Lockdown Drill Itself

BY JOSEPH WILSON

PHOTO © WANG TOM/123RF

When the house is quiet and dark, that's when the nightmares come. Elizabeth, 5, has been waking up recently. I sat on her bed stroking her hair.

"I dreamed a monster was chasing me," she says.

"Oh no, what kind of monster?" I ask.

"Lockdown."

"It was called 'lockdown'? What did you do?"

"I hid under my desk."

From the age of four, when they start school, students in my daughter's school board practice a lockdown procedure in case there is a security threat in the building.

Procedures vary slightly for different school boards, but the basics are the same: lock

[My daughter] had internalized the fear but did not understand the reason for the procedure.

the door, turn off the lights, close the curtains and hide. Most students in the Greater Toronto Area now perform some sort of lockdown drill at least twice a year.

I'm not sure it's a good policy. Schools are one of the safest places kids can be. The world outside the walls of the school are much more dangerous than within, and kids should feel safe in their schools. Students cannot learn when they are scared. The fear these drills instill, which can last a lifetime for anxious children, might be worse than the problem they were meant to solve.

Relevant Reading: That Time My Daughter's School Went On Lockdown (<http://www.cbc.ca/parents/learning/view/that-time-my-daughters-school-went-on-lockdown>)

Generally, the teachers do a fantastic job of not trying to freak out the kids, but something always gets lost in translation. For my daughter, she thought they were literally hiding from a bad guy called "lockdown." She had internalized the fear but did not understand the reason for the procedure. It reminds me of the air raid sirens that would go off in the '50s and '60s, prompting kids to dive under their desks to protect themselves from a nuclear attack.

It's significant that the monster of my daughter's nightmare is not a person with a gun, but the lockdown drill itself.

The kids tell each other stories, trying to make sense of this bizarre ritual. Some students try to explain what they know about school shootings in the States.

Unfortunately, the teachers are not always there to guide these conversations, so anxiety manifests itself as a shapeless hunter: the monster of Elizabeth's nightmares.

My older daughter (seven) understands a little more. Sonia knows there are people who do bad things in the world and has heard the word "terrorist" at school. One of her friends, a recent immigrant from Paris, described the Bataclan club attacks.

Sonia went through a period of getting scared before she went to bed. With tears streaming down her face she would explain that the other kids in her class weren't being quiet enough during the lockdown drill, and that the noise would lead a

murderer to their classroom. She desperately wanted the other kids to take the drill as seriously as she did. She felt her life depended on it.

Relevant Reading: Why I'm Ignoring My Daughter's School Dress Code

(<http://www.cbc.ca/parents/learning/view/why-im-ignoring-my-daughters-school-dress-code>)

Elizabeth and Sonia are not the only ones who have nightmares. When awful things appear in my Twitter feed, or on the front page of the paper — as they did after the van attack on Yonge Street — it colours the content of my dreams. I described to Elizabeth what I do: I find a member of the family to snuggle, I sometimes turn on my light and read or I take a sip of water. I count my breathing and think of things that make me happy.

She doesn't seem convinced that will work. Thankfully, she's so tired when she wakes that she soon drifts back to sleep. I think about how safe she is in our home. In our efforts to protect our kids from the gut-churning violence of the modern world, we might be doing more harm than good. We are instilling a core of fear, of distrust, at an age far too young to understand the consequences of those emotions.

It's significant that the monster of my daughter's nightmare is not a person with a gun, but the lockdown drill itself. Every time we run the script on the vanishingly small possibility that a shooter will walk into their school, kids are primed to feel fear and are led to believe that school shootings are more common than they really are in Canada. We can do better.

SHARE



You Might Also Like



I Think The Policing Of School Lunches Has Gone Too Far

(<https://www.cbc.ca/parents/learning/view/lunch-shaming-is-real-and-it-happened-to-my-daughter>)



My 10-Year-Old Plans To 'Vote' For Justin Trudeau

(<https://www.cbc.ca/parents/learning/view/federal-election-canada-2021-parents-and-kids>)
