

Nurseries and Daycare Facilities

Fire drills are an important safety practice, and legal requirement, within any commercial property, and educational facilities are no exception. However, when these environments contain young children, greater attention and care will need to be given to the process and its efficiency.

Under the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order, a fire risk assessment must be in place at all daycare and educational facilities. Detailed within the assessment should be instructions regarding fire drills, with directions for hazard identification, evacuation routes, assembly points, alarm tests and other factors related to testing the efficacy of an escape plan.

In a nursery or daycare environment, this means clearly signed and accessible fire exits that remain clear of obstruction, as well as a safe and contained assembly point that is away from dangers such as vehicles and unsafe surfaces.

The nature of some daycare facilities means that not all children who may attend are in on the same day. This will necessitate carrying out drills on different days of the week in order to familiarise all children to the process, limiting stress and panic in the event of a real evacuation. Similarly, increasing the regularity of drills means more practice and increased familiarity.

Explaining in a Simple Way



The loud noise and hurried activity of a fire drill can upset a child, particularly one that is unaware of what is happening. That's why, where possible in regards to age and understanding, it is important to inform children (and staff) as to what to expect during a fire drill without panicking them or undermining the importance.

Turning your explanation into a kind of game can help, detailing the “actions” and “rules” used when a fire alarm goes off (e.g. staying calm, following a staff member through the nearest fire exit, walking to the assembly point, lining up in a specific place etc).

With facilities containing older children, such as infant schools, it could be beneficial to encourage the children to alert a member of staff immediately upon seeing a fire. Some schools use an item that represents a fire (such as a large photograph of a blaze) that can be hidden on the premises. Any child that finds the object must alert an adult at once.

This approach can be applied to all areas of fire safety, not just related to drills. For example, giving children an understanding of the basics of the Fire Triangle (fuel, ignition and oxygen) will help them to learn to associate fire hazards with danger.

Step-by-step

1. Many prefer to inform children that a drill will be taking place and when, so as to avoid panic (as opposed to catching them unawares in order to practice a real life scenario). Make this clear to all children before sounding the alarm.
2. Upon sounding the alarm, ensure that all children are gathered and do a quick visual inspection of the area.
3. Walk out through the closest fire exit, ensuring that all children follow. If possible, have an adult at both the front and back of the line of children.
4. At the assembly point, take a register to ensure that all children are present. Having them line up in relation to classroom or group can help. Prior to future drills, set up not only an offsite register, but a list of emergency contact details for parents and carers in case this information cannot be taken out of the building with you during a fire.
5. It is incredibly important to record and review the success of your drill after each one. This includes all aspects, from ensuring that evacuation routes are appropriate for young children, to avoiding designating assembly points that require the crossing of roads or navigation of car parks.
6. Make all fire drill information, including the location of fire exits and assembly points, accessible to parents, too. If any are onsite during a drill, they will need to take part.

Further Reading

Communicating important information such as the importance of fire safety and fire drills to young children can be difficult – both in order to get the pertinent information across and to not scare the child. A few books designed to tackle this subject exist, including:

- [Arthur's Fire Drill](#) – Marc Brown
- [Big Frank's Fire Truck](#) – Leslie McGuire
- [Miss Mingo and the Fire Drill](#) – Jamie Harper
- [Fire Drill](#) – Paul Dubois Jacobs, Jennifer Swender

Always work within your settings agreed ways of working and policies and procedures