# Practice Makes Perfect

## Preschoolers Breeze Through Tornado Drill

**BY KEN LITTLE**
STAFF WRITER

Three-year-olds can be surprisingly attentive.

A tornado drill held Wednesday at The Children's Center day care facility on Fairgrounds Lane as part of the statewide observance of Severe Weather Awareness Week proved compelling topic matter.

A group of 3-year-olds walked in an orderly file from their classroom into a laundry room with cinder block walls, sat down, and listened as teacher Patty Nelson explained the purpose of the drill.

Most have a basic understanding of what they were doing. The children were part of the group of more than 80 preschoolers who participated in the tornado drill at the day care center operated by the Holston United Methodist Home for Children. Similar drills have been conducted this week at other day care facilities, schools and businesses across Greene County.

Heather Sipe, director of the Greene County Office of Emergency Management, was on hand with Letisha Ricker, office administrative assistant, to observe.

Tornado drills are conducted twice a year at the day care center, said Kathy Meredith, director of early childhood ministries at the Holston Home for Children.

"We don't want it to be scary. We just want them to understand what they're supposed to do," Meredith said.



SUN PHOTO BY KEN LITTLE

**These 3-year-olds, with an exception or two, follow instructions by teacher Patty Nelson during a tornado drill held Wednesday at The Children's Center daycare facility on Fairgrounds Lane. The drill was held in conjunction with others at schools and health care providers in Greene County during Tennessee Severe Weather Awareness Week.**

As the drill began, Meredith spoke over the day care center's public address system.

"Everybody listen up. It's tornado drill time," she said. Meredith also sounded a horn that makes a noise like one used by a clown. It's used to differentiate in the children's minds the tornado drill from monthly fire drills conducted at The Children's Center.

"We talk about what is that sound and why we are going in that room," Meredith said. "We break it down for them as simple as we can."

Nelson told the children to cover their heads. First, they passed the time by singing a song.

"You'd be surprised how much they talk about this after they're done," Meredith said.

The message is tailored to the age of the child. The day care center has children up to 5 years old, and babies as

SEE **DRILL**, PAGE 7A

# DRILL

FROM PAGE 1A

young as 6 months.

Sipe said tornado drills are required at all day care centers in the county. Each one also must have an emergency plan in place.

The county emergency management office reviews the plans of each facility, Sipe said.

"They take it seriously. What we had in 2011, it helps people keep alert," she said.

A tornado outbreak in April 2011 killed eight people in Greene County. The deadly storms remain fresh in the minds of all those who lived through them.

Sipe designated Wednesday as Tornado Drill Day in Greene County.

Sipe said the drills are a part of Severe Weather Awareness Week each year "because the repetition increases the ability to prepare as well as increase the level of awareness."

Afterward, Meredith asked the children what they had just participated in.

"A tornado drill," several answered.

Office manager Susan Sheets assisted Meredith with the children.

"They did good. They're like sponges," Sheets said. "They absorb the information."

Sipe said the remainder of the week is a good time for others to hold tornado drills.

"We encourage local school systems, daycares, health care facilities and businesses to put their emergency plans into practice and to plan drills on a regular basis to establish effectiveness in a real-world event," she said.

Meredith showed Sipe each location in the building children would be taken in the event of an actual emergency.

"If the kids are in a tornado, they've got to be in the safest place," Sipe said. "That's one of the biggest things we look at. As far as emergency management, our main concern is the tornadoes."

"Preparedness is critical to helping Tennesseans be resilient when faced with a disaster or in its aftermath," Patrick Sheehan, Tennessee Emergency Management Agency director, said in a news release this week.

"Resiliency means understanding hazards and threats, like severe weather, making sure you have multiple ways to receive disaster warnings and information, and having an emergency plan and supplies so you can keep yourself and your loved ones safe before and after an emergency," Sheehan said.



SUN PHOTO BY KEN LITTLE

These 3-year-olds shelter in a laundry room Wednesday at The Children's Center on Fairgrounds Lane. A tornado drill was held at the day care center in conjunction with Severe Weather Awareness Week in Tennessee. Schools, health care providers and businesses across the county also conducted tornado drills Wednesday.~~<p class="p1">~~