

Protecting Yourself and Others

Lifesaving tips when facing an armed intruder or active shooter

Mike Bolender & Ted Hayes

Editor's note: School districts should work with local law enforcement to develop and review safety plans for their buildings and to conduct staff trainings. Below are tips from the Peaceful Warrior Training Group that may be helpful to your district in developing and reviewing its plans.

Even with all of the violent incidents occurring in today's world, your chances of being involved in an active shooter situation are slim. However, unfortunately, armed intruders and active shooter situations are occurring with greater frequency every year.

Statistics indicate that about 60 percent of active shooter situations are over within five minutes — the shooter leaves the area, the shooter takes their own life (about 40 percent), or law enforcement or a citizen neutralizes the situation. Knowing exactly what to do during those few minutes may mean the difference between life and death for you, a coworker and many others in your building.

Simply stated, an active shooter seeks three factors:

- Easy 'targets of opportunity;'
- Little or no barricades or restrictions that will limit their movement; and
- Little or no supervision or confrontation that will restrict or end their actions.

■ Run – Hide – Fight

Remember, you can survive an active shooter incident. The best response plans are those that allow you to switch and move between response alternatives as the context of the incident evolves and changes.

Move with Purpose — playing dead or freezing may get you killed —

action will provide a chance and may save your life — so learn to move with purpose. The context of your situation will dictate your purpose. An armed intruder or active shooter situation will evolve rapidly and new details may be limited; you also must be able to adjust as the situation changes.

If you are in another area of the building when an initial attack occurs, your response alternatives will differ from those individuals who are in the immediate area of shooter. Active shooter situations are dynamic and evolve quickly. If the shooting starts down the hall from your location, your options are to lockdown/barricade (if you are in a lockable space) or create distance if

PRACTICE rapid-response lockdown.

Identify the process and actions you will take to lockdown and/or barricade your occupied space.



A member of the Peaceful Warrior Training Group leads an active shooter training.

you have no lockable space or there is a clear path to an exit.

The shooting down the hall could very quickly migrate to your space, which dramatically changes what life-saving alternatives work best. The closer you are to the shooter, the less response alternatives you will have.

■ ■ ■ RUN

Simply stated, you run to get out of the area quickly and safely creating distance between yourself and the shooter. Always run away from the sound of gunfire.

When running from a shooter, create distance and 90 degree angles between you and the shooter. This can be accomplished by moving into opposing hallways, rooms, alcoves, doorways, etc.

Once you have evacuated the immediate area, scatter from others and run as far away as you can.

Once you are safe, call 911.

Be prepared to provide exact details to the 911 operator. When you call 911, don't assume the

person you are speaking to knows your exact location; some 911 calls go to a county-wide dispatch center. Inform the operator of the city and your exact location, "I'm at ABC High School, 123 Main Street, Hometown, Wisconsin and there is an active shooter in the building." If possible, give a description of shooter's appearance, weapon types, location, direction of travel in the building, location of known injured, etc.

■ ■ ■ HIDE

If you hear gunshots (or what you perceive to be gunshots) and can't get out of the building, it's time to lockdown and barricade. Simply hiding under a table or desk with no barricade between you and the shooter will not protect you.

Immediately lock and barricade the door. Use large, heavy, moveable objects to barricade the door. Tables, desks, filing cabinets, chairs and other objects can be used to block entry in to the room. These objects should also be used to block the door window so the shooter cannot

easily see in to the room.

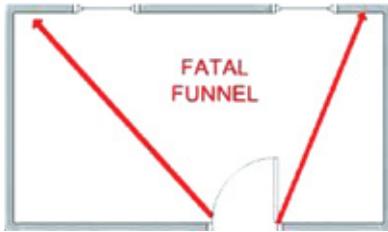
Turn off the lights and silence all cell phones. The noise or the illumination emitted from a cell phone may tip off the shooter of your location.

Always spread out throughout the room. Don't huddle together and create easy targets for the shooter.

Keep calm and quiet in the room. Turn off lights, silence cell phones, keep quiet, and don't cast shadows under the door. Identify a secondary exit (door, window, breach a wall) that you can get out if needed. Break a window and evacuate if you are able. If you can't get out, position yourself against the wall, two to three feet from the knob side of the door. Have a pre-planned, improvised weapon and be ready to use it. If it's time for action versus reaction — you attack first — action always beats reaction.

Never stand in the 'fatal funnel.' Past history indicates that shooters do not spend a great deal of time trying to breach a door unless they have a specific target in mind. Shooters know that law enforcement will be responding soon. They may

attempt for four to six seconds to enter the room. If unsuccessful in their efforts, they may fire a few rounds through the door, hoping to strike someone inside. It's then time to move on and look for easier targets. Instruct everyone to never stand in front of the door and avoid the 'fatal funnel.'



— — — FIGHT

Engage the shooter if running and hiding are not options. When no other alternative is available — you can't create distance, lockdown/barricade, or get out of a secondary exit — find a distraction object to

throw at the shooter and create a plan in case the shooter finds you.

Plan to throw objects at the shooter's face and eyes — when they flinch it's time to act — initiate your plan which could be to create more distance, get to a lockable space, create 90 degree angles or engage/attack the shooter.

Find anything to use as a weapon

— a stapler, the fire extinguisher, your laptop computer, your forearm/ elbow, etc.

Attack the trauma susceptible

targets. This includes the eyes, all sides of the neck, the clavicle, the solar plexus, the groin, ankles, and knees. Identify your target and drive through with your weapon.

If possible, attack with numbers. If you have no other options, attack the shooter as a team style. If even one person attacks the shooter, validate their decision and help them!

■ **Team Tactics**

If you are using team tactics to attack the shooter, the first person attempts to control the weapon/arm to get the weapon pointed in a safe direction. The second person attacks trauma susceptible targets with a planned or improvised weapon or their forearm/elbow. Repeatedly strike through the target until the shooter is completely disabled.

When the weapon is disengaged from the shooter, remove it as far away from the shooter as possible.

Do NOT have the weapon in your hands as you exit the building or when law enforcement enters the building. Remember, law enforcement does not know who or where the shooter is located; having a weapon in your hands could lead to deadly consequences.

When law enforcement enters the area, listen and strictly follow their commands. Always maintain your

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ADDITIONAL TIPS

Be prepared to ‘act not react.’

People die when they mistakenly believe they must confirm the crisis is real. If you hear a sound that you perceive to be a gunshot, it is a gunshot until proven otherwise. It's acceptable to individually initiate your lockdown or run-hide-fight protocols — if it's proven to be a non-crisis, that's OK.

Create mental action scripts.

An action script is a mental rehearsal plan of what — if scenarios regarding your immediate response to variety of crises — ‘if this happens, I will do that.’

hands above your head unless you are containing the gunman. Always allow law enforcement to take command of the situation.

Day-to-Day Awareness

Day-to-day awareness is your best personal and professional protection mechanism. No matter where you are or what you are doing, develop a thorough understanding of your surroundings. Know how to safely evacuate the area; know how to barricade your area/room; and as a last resort understand how and when to fight the intruder.

It is important to always be observant. Use all of your senses, being attentive to your surroundings at all



Holding active shooter training workshops can help prepare staff.

times. Intuitive concern means trusting your instincts and intuition. We get in trouble when ignoring what our gut is telling us. When you sense an unexplained concern or uneasiness about someone or something, look deeper at the situation or person and identify if there is danger or pending attack.

Understand your surroundings every time you enter a building. Look around — try to find at least two exit routes out of each area/room and the building itself. Take the time to enter and leave the building using different routes. This familiarity with the building layout will be beneficial during a real evacuation.

Always say something. Learn to report all suspicious activities, people, or vehicles to law enforcement. It is law enforcement's job to determine if the activity is something other than it appears to be. The safest organizations are those that expand this concept and follow ‘Hear or See Something, Say or Do Something.’ If

you hear something (in person) or see comments, statements or questions on social media that cause concern, bring that concern to a supervisor and/or the authorities. This also means if you see or hear signs of imminent danger — gunshots, yelling, screaming, or reports of an intruder — don't go to verify what is happening. Instead, act by initiating your pre-planned action script.

Post a copy of your brightly colored crisis plan in the same location in every area/room.

Look around the room for potential weapons. Every building/room contains many objects that can be used as weapons to distract or even disable an armed intruder or shooter.

Know how to implement your personal ripple of safety. During a lockdown or evacuation, know how to:

- Get yourself safe as quickly as possible.
- Notify others so they can get safe and begin their own ‘ripple of safety.’
- Activate your organization's emergency notification system.
- Call 911.

Initially your biggest obstacle will be denial — get by denial and act! ■

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M3 Insurance is an endorsed agency through the WASB Insurance Plan. For more information, visit wasb.org and select “WASB Insurance Plan.”

SCHOOL SAFETY RESOURCES

There are many resources available to help districts train staff, develop crisis plans, and get more information about strategies to keep your schools, staff and students safe.

PEACEFUL WARRIOR TRAINING GROUP | Mike Bolender, one of the authors of this article, offers active shooter and other trainings through his group Peaceful Warrior Training Group — pwtraininggroup.com

VIOLENCE PREVENTION PROGRAM ASSESSMENT TOOL | The Department of Public Instruction's Violence Prevention Program Assessment Tool helps schools “identify gaps and strengths in their violence prevention program.” dpi.wi.gov/sspw/safe-schools/assessment