

Active shooting incidents are more common than they used to be, but they are still rare. Don't be paranoid – be prepared. Develop a plan.

Active Shooter Training Handout

April 19 & 20



How to survive an Active Shooting Event

The natural response for most people caught in an active shooter event, at least initially, is to do nothing. The human brain is predisposed to assume that life will proceed in a predictable, normal way. That “normalcy bias” makes us think everything is ok even when it is not. When the normal pattern is broken, it takes a while for the brain to comprehend it and convince you that the danger is real. It is common for people involved in an active shooting event to say that at first it felt surreal – like they were watching a movie and it wasn’t really happening. They often say they thought the gunshots were fireworks, or a car backfiring, or a book falling – things that would fit better into the paradigm of their daily life. Another bias that keeps us from taking action is our natural tendency to follow the crowd. If we see that everyone else is cowering in fear or frozen in place, our natural tendency is to do the same.

You can overcome these tendencies by deciding what you would do during an active shooting event before one ever happens. You need to have a plan and to visualize what you would do if an active shooter appeared. Would you run? If so, where would you go? If you couldn’t run, would you hide? Would you fight? Visualize your plan in as much detail as possible and rehearse it in your head.

OODA Loop: Observe, Orient, Decide, Act

The OODA loop is a way of understanding how humans process information and react under pressure. You OBSERVE what is going on around you. (What’s happening?) You ORIENT yourself to your surroundings. (What options do I have? What can I do to tip the odds in my favor?) You DECIDE what you are going to do. (What is your plan?) You then ACT. (Implement your plan). In a life or death situation, you need to be able to process through the OODA loop as quickly and effectively as possible in order to survive. Keep working through the OODA loop as your situation changes (Observe, Orient, Decide, Act) until you are safely away from danger.

In an active shooter situation, every second counts. Having a general plan in mind will give you a head start and allow you to work through the OODA loop a lot faster. Remember, in any conflict there are multiple loops going on. It’s your loop versus the shooter’s, and if you can outthink your opponent you will win the fight.

Jumpstart your OODA loop by coming up with a plan of what you would do in an active shooter situation before one ever happens. By doing so, you’re already engaged in the second step: Orienting. You can act faster because you’ve already begun the cycle and already have a plan in place.

Maintain Situational Awareness Wherever You Go

Condition Yellow is best described as “relaxed alert.” There’s no specific threat, but you have your head up and you’re taking in your surroundings with all your senses. Try to stay in condition yellow when you are out in public. Don’t allow your smartphone or iPod to block your sensory inputs.

Establish baselines and look for anomalies

A baseline is what’s “normal” for a given situation. If something or someone doesn’t look right to you, trust your intuition. For example, if you’re at a movie theater and you see someone entering the theater through the emergency exit door near the screen, you should definitely be on alert. It could

just be someone sneaking in for a free movie, but it's not "normal" for the situation. Keep an eye on him and make sure he isn't a threat. In your workplace, you know what behavior is normal so don't ignore someone who causes you concern. Be on alert until the situation is resolved.

Know where all your exits are

Always know the locations of the nearest exits because running should be your first line of action in an active shooter situation. You want to get as far away from the gunman as possible which usually requires getting out of the building where the shooting is happening.

Your Active Shooter Triage: Run, Hide, Fight

You've heard gunshots and screams – you're in the middle of an active shooter incident. What should you do? Just remember Run, Hide, Fight.

Run

As soon as you hear gunfire, leave the area as soon as you can and get as far away from the shooter as possible. Observe (I hear gunfire) Orient (Where is it coming from? Can I escape? What are my escape routes?) Decide (What plan gives me the best chance of survival?) Act (Execute your plan). Continue to observe, orient, decide, and act until you are safe.

Keep in mind that in an active shooter situation many people won't leave because they're frozen in fear, they've allowed the normalcy bias take over, or they think hiding is their only option. But you need to run if you can, regardless of what others are doing. Do all you can to convince them to leave with you, but be prepared to leave them and get out of the building on your own. When you're running, keep your hands visible so law enforcement can see that you're not a threat. Once you're out of the danger area, prevent others from going in.

Don't try to move or assist the wounded because it leaves you vulnerable to attack. The first law enforcement officers to arrive will ignore the wounded until they have neutralized the shooter. Their top priority is to stop the gunman. Your top priority is to get to safety.

If you're in an open area, run as fast as you can. Shooting a moving target is hard even for an experienced marksman. Most mass shooters have very little experience with firearms. Your chances increase exponentially as you get farther and farther away from the shooter.

Hide

Sometimes running isn't an option. The shooter could be in front of the only exit and you can't jump out the window because you're on the fourth floor. If you can't escape, then hide and secure your location the best you can.

You want to hide in a place that is out of the shooter's view and that can provide protection if shots are fired in your direction. If you are in an office or school building, try to find a room that has a lockable door and then barricade it with anything you can find. Law enforcement officers are on the way – you want to delay the shooter as long as possible to give law enforcement time to stop him.

Turn off the lights and be as quiet as possible. Stay away from the door and crouch behind items that offer protection. If possible, dial 911 and let the authorities know there's an active shooter in your building. If you can't speak because the shooter is nearby, leave the line open so the dispatcher can hear what's going on.

Fight

Once you have barricaded yourself in, prepare to fight. Commit to the idea that you will attack an active shooter violently and without hesitation. History has shown that an active shooter will mercilessly shoot those who beg for their lives. He expects you to be defenselessly curled up in the fetal position. Defy that expectation. Don't ever give up. Get inside his OODA loop. Don't do what he expects you to do. Fight with everything you have.

How to Fight an Active Shooter

Most violent gunmen operate under the assumption that because they have a gun, people will just cower in fear. They don't expect someone to come charging at them. An important part of winning any fight is disrupting your opponent's OODA loop. Charging a gunman does that because he is not expecting anyone to offer resistance. Understand that and use it to your advantage. Be aggressive and violent. Once you decide to fight, attack with unbridled violence and aggression. Your mission is to inflict as much violence as possible on the shooter. Victory will go to the swift and relentless. Use lethal force and don't ever stop fighting.

Use improvised weapons. Just because you don't have a gun, doesn't mean you don't have a weapon. Weapons are force multipliers and almost anything in your environment can be turned into one: chairs, fire extinguishers, umbrellas, belts, scissors, hot coffee, a butter knife, a book. Throw anything you can at the shooter. Even if it doesn't disable him, you are disrupting him and creating opportunities to attack. Spray a fire extinguisher or throw a pot of hot coffee in his face. Remember, disrupt his OODA loop! Work as a team. The more people you can get to help you attack the shooter, the better your chances are. Be assertive and be a leader. Courage is contagious.

Conclusion

Active shooting incidents are more common than they used to be, but they are still rare. Don't be paranoid – be prepared. Develop a plan. Instill in yourself a survival mindset. Commit to taking action. Know that you can outthink your opponent. Never, ever give up.