



SAFETY MATTERS

RISK MANAGEMENT NEWSLETTER

IN THIS ISSUE

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- Responding To an Active Shooter Situation
- Respond Immediately
- Run/Hide/Fight
- Resources

ACTIVE SHOOTER SITUATIONS

OBJECTIVE To educate your organization on preparing for an active shooter incident. Response steps to take during an active shooter situation to minimize the effectiveness of a shooter on the premises.

AN ACTIVE SHOOTER IS AN INDIVIDUAL actively engaged in killing or attempting to kill people in a confined and populated area. The prevention of these incidents requires continued effort of both private and public entities. No educational environment is immune to the risks of an active shooter incident. However, there are steps that you can take to assure that your district staff are prepared for response if the scenario presents itself.

RESPONDING TO AN ACTIVE SHOOTER SITUATION

School Emergency Operation Plans (EOPs) should include courses of action that will describe how students and staff can most effectively respond to an active shooter situation to minimize the loss of life, and teach and train on these practices, as deemed appropriate by the school.





Law enforcement officers may not be present when a shooting begins. The first law enforcement officers on the scene may arrive after the shooting has ended. Making sure the staff knows how to respond and instruct their students can help prevent and reduce the loss of life.

No single response fits all active shooter situations. However, making sure everyone knows their options and can respond decisively will save valuable time. Depicting scenarios and considering response options in advance will assist individuals and groups in quickly selecting their best course of action.

Understandably, this is a highly sensitive topic. There is no single answer for what to do, but a survival mindset can increase the odds of surviving. As appropriate for your community, it may be valuable to schedule a time for an open conversation on this important topic. Though some parents or personnel may find the conversation uncomfortable, they may also find it reassuring to know that, as a whole, their school has a plan to respond to an active shooter situation, in the unfortunate event that one occurs.

During such an event, the natural human reaction (even if you are highly trained) is to be startled, feel fear and anxiety—and even experience initial disbelief and denial. You can expect to hear noise from alarms, gunfire and explosions, and people shouting and screaming. Training provides the means to regain your composure, recall at least some of what you have learned, and commit to action. There are three basic options: run, hide, or fight. You can run away from the shooter, seek a secure place where you can hide and/or deny the shooter access, or incapacitate the shooter to survive and protect others from harm.

As the situation develops, it is possible that students and staff will need to use more than one option. During an active shooter situation, staff will rarely have all of the information they need to make a fully informed decision about which option is best. While they should follow the plan and any instructions given during an incident, often they will have to rely on their own judgment to decide which option will best protect lives.

RESPOND IMMEDIATELY

It is not uncommon for people confronted with a threat to first deny the possible danger rather than respond. An investigation by the National Institute of Standards and Technology (2005) into the collapse of the World Trade Center towers on September 11, 2001, found that people close to the floors impacted waited longer to start evacuating than those on unaffected floors. Similarly, during the Virginia Tech shooting, individuals on campus responded to the shooting with varying degrees of urgency. These studies highlight this delayed response or denial. For example, some people report hearing firecrackers when in fact they heard gunfire.

Staff should be trained to overcome denial and to respond immediately, including fulfilling their responsibilities for individuals in their charge. For example, train staff to recognize the sounds of danger, act, and forcefully communicate the danger and necessary action (e.g., “Gun! Get out!”) to those in their charge. In addition, those closest to the public address or other communications system, or otherwise able to alert others, should communicate the danger and necessary action. Repetition in training and preparedness shortens the time it takes to orient, observe, and act.

Upon recognizing the danger, as soon as it is safe to do so, staff or others must alert responders by contacting 911 with as clear and accurate information as possible.

RUN

If it is safe to do so for yourself and those in your care, the first course of action that should be taken is to run out of the building and far away until you are in a safe location.

Students and staff should be trained to:

- Leave personal belongings behind;
- Visualize possible escape routes, including physically accessible routes for students and staff with disabilities;
- Avoid escalators and elevators;
- Escape with as many others as possible, but do not stay behind because others will not go;
- Call 911 when safe to do so; and
- Let a responsible adult know where they are.





HIDE

If running is not a safe option, hide in as safe a place as possible.

Students and staff should be trained to hide in a location where the walls might be thicker and have fewer windows. In addition:

- Lock the doors;
- Barricade the doors with heavy furniture;
- Close and lock windows and close blinds or cover windows;
- Turn off lights;
- Silence all electronic devices;
- Remain silent;
- Hide along the wall closest to the exit but out of the view from the hallway (allowing for an ambush of the shooter and for possible escape if the shooter enters the room);
- Use strategies to silently communicate with first responders if possible, for example, in rooms with exterior windows make signs to silently signal law enforcement officers and emergency responders to indicate the status of the room's occupants; and
- Remain in place until given an all clear by identifiable law enforcement officers.

FIGHT

If neither running nor hiding is a safe option, as a last resort when confronted by the shooter, adults in immediate danger should consider trying to disrupt or incapacitate the shooter by using aggressive force and items in their environment, such as fire extinguishers and chairs. In a study of 41 active shooter events that ended before law enforcement officers arrived, the potential victims stopped the attacker themselves in 16 instances. In 13 of those cases, they physically subdued the attacker. While talking to staff about confronting a shooter may be daunting and upsetting for some, they should know that they may be able to successfully take action to save lives. To be clear, confronting an active shooter should never be a requirement in any school employee's job description; how each staff member chooses to respond if directly confronted

by an active shooter is up to him or her. Further, the possibility of an active shooter situation is not justification for the presence of firearms on campus in the hands of any personnel other than law enforcement officers.

RESOURCES

Ready Houston — “Run, Hide, Fight” Materials

As part of its preparedness mission, Ready Houston produces “Run, Hide, Fight” videos, handouts, and trainings to promote preparedness among residents of the Houston region. 20 These materials are not specific to a school setting but may still be helpful. Please note that these videos are not recommended for viewing by minors. All of these resources are available free of charge, and many are available on-demand at [this link](#).

Center for Personal Protection and Safety (K–12 School Safety) — Tiered Training Options

Cal/OSHA — Guidelines for Workplace Security

FBI — Active Shooter Resources

Department of Homeland Security (DHS) — Active Shooter, How to Respond

Readiness and Emergency Management for Schools (REMS) — Active Shooter Situations

This California Schools JPA Safety Matters fact sheet is not intended to be exhaustive. The discussion and best practices suggested herein should not be regarded as legal advice. Readers should pursue legal counsel or contact their insurance providers to gain more exhaustive advice.





SIGN-IN SHEET

ACTIVE SHOOTER SITUATIONS

Trainer: _____ Trainer's Signature: _____

Date: _____ Organization: _____ Department: _____

Class Participants:

Name: _____	Signature: _____
Name: _____	Signature: _____
Name: _____	Signature: _____
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