

# WHAT YOU SHOULD DO IN AN ACTIVE SHOOTER SITUATION

## HOW TO WATCH OUT FOR POTENTIAL ACTIVE SHOOTER SITUATIONS.

One student's quick thinking saved lives at a Rainier, Washington, high school in June 2016. A 35-year-old man approached the student outside the school and asked if the building had metal detectors. The school was already on lockdown after the man had threatened to shoot an ex-girlfriend, her family and employees at the school. The student told the school's resource officer about the encounter, and police quickly found the man and arrested him. He was armed with a handgun.

Then there was the fast action of one Illinois high school teacher, Angela McQueen, in September 2017. She tackled an armed student shooter in the school cafeteria before he could kill classmates. She was trained and used overwhelming force to stop the student even as his finger was still on the trigger.

There have been many incidents reported in the news where heroic law enforcement officers or bystanders have saved lives in active shooter situations. There are no statistics on how many lives have been saved because someone stopped a shooter. We can only know the grim results of lives ended prematurely and of grieving families when shooters succeeded.

Fortunately, in a country of 350 million people, our odds of being caught up in an active shooter scenario are slight. However, **staying alert and being aware is like looking both ways before crossing the street.** It is the recognition that the danger is out there and being mentally prepared that could save you or your children from being a gunshot victim.

Here are some sobering mass shooting statistics from GunViolenceArchive.org:

- **From January to October 2017, there were 281 mass shootings** in the United States. (GVA defines a mass shooting as an incident where four or more people were either wounded or killed, not including the gunman.)
- Incidents occurred in **39 of the 50 states.**
- With the recent mass shooting in Las Vegas, Nevada leads the nation with 300 casualties (59 dead, 241 wounded).
- Excluding Nevada, the state with the most mass shootings is Illinois (165) with Chicago claiming the lion's share (131) of that total.

Food for thought: If you live in one of the 11 states that had no mass shootings, you still could have been one of the over 450 Las Vegas visitors shot on that violent Sunday evening in October 2017.

# YOU ONLY HAVE MINUTES TO REACT



From the time you hear the gunshots, you only have minutes to decide what to do. An FBI study in 2014 found that active shootings typically end in two minutes or less, usually not enough time for police to arrive. You must have answers to these questions beforehand:

- Should you run away? Where could you hide? What should you do if you have no alternative than to confront the shooter?
- Are you prepared to follow your employer's active shooter preparedness plan?
- When you are out in public, how can you keep yourself and your children safe in an active shooter situation?

This guide is a compendium of the best advice on how to answer those questions.

## WHY VICTIMS FREEZE, AND HOW TO OVERCOME THAT TENDENCY

When emergency strikes, your response plan must overcome the instinctive panic or inertia. The term "plan" implies advanced thought, preparation, and practice. Otherwise, adrenaline takes over either in the form of foolishly implemented "flight or fight" or, more commonly, doing nothing at all.

### **Normalcy bias controls our reactions.**

Remember the last time you were witness to or involved in an emergency situation? Was your first reaction one of disbelief? Did the adrenaline jolt seem to diminish your reasoning process and short-circuit you into just freezing up? If so, and unless you are trained in combat or emergency response, you are not alone.

Most people freeze up in emergency situations and "normalcy bias" causes victims and bystanders to behave as if everything is fine and will go on as before. During the mass

shooting in Las Vegas on October 1, 2017, for example, many people in the crowd of over 20,000 convinced themselves that the rapid sniper fire was just fireworks.

### **We follow the crowd.**

Another bias that causes the freeze-up in emergencies is a natural tendency to do what everyone else is doing. Inertia can be as infectious and panic. For example, if we see everyone frozen in fear and cowering, the natural tendency is to behave the same way.

### **Overcoming the freeze factor.**

The foregoing behaviors are the inclinations and aspects of passiveness. To overcome them, you must have a plan. The plan involves decisions in advance on exactly what you will do during an active shooter situation.

## YOUR EMPLOYER'S RESPONSIBILITY

OSHA guidelines under its General Duty Clause are that your employer is required to protect everyone against "recognized hazards likely to cause serious injuries or death." As such, your employer should have an active shooter emergency response policy. The policy should advise and inform employees of what to do, including alternatives of:

- evacuating the area
- hiding out/locking down
- self-defense as a last resort

The plan should also include what to do when law enforcement arrives.



# TAKING RESPONSIBILITY FOR YOUR OWN SAFETY



Within the context of the alternatives of flee, hide, or fight, here is what you should decide on in advance.

## **Run Away.**

If you have an escape path that will avoid crossing paths with the shooter, evacuate the premises. Here are some guidelines:

- Decide in advance on your escape route, depending on the location of the shooter.
- Run away regardless of what others do.
- Don't take time to gather your belongings.
- If possible, help others who are able to escape.
- Do not attempt to move wounded people. You could become another casualty if you stop and try to help.
- Warn others about entering an area where the active shooter may be.
- Keep your hands visible at all times. Follow the instructions of any police officers.
- Call 911 when you are safe. Someone may have already called, but your call will provide additional vital information to the police dispatcher.

## **Hide if you can't run.**

Scout out and decide in advance where you would hide from an active shooter. The hiding place should be inconspicuous and outside the shooter's line of sight. It should be relatively bulletproof, like a bathroom or behind a locked door. Ideally, the hiding place should not trap you or restrict your movements.

## **While in hiding:**

- If you must stay in place, barricade the entrance. Lock the door, and, if possible, blockade the shooter's entry with heavy furniture.
- Place cell phones on silent and turn off any other source of noise.

- Hide behind cabinets, desks, or other large pieces of furniture.
- Stay low, quiet, and motionless.
- Beware of subterfuge. Shooters have been known to pose as rescuers to lure victims out of their hiding places. Call 911 or take steps to verify that the scene is clear of danger.

## **Fight if you must.**

As a last resort, and only if you believe your life is in imminent danger, take action. Your goals are to disrupt the shooter's plan so others can escape and to incapacitate the shooter.

Aggressive behavior has its own startling effect on an armed assailant who expects submissive behavior from his victims. If you commit to the idea that you absolutely must defend yourself, you'll be prepared to attack an active shooter.

Your attack must be quick, merciless, and devastating. You might get shot, but the alternative is doing nothing and dying anyway.

Even if you are not trained in physical combat, simply yelling and charging the shooter puts you at an advantage. Again, the gunman does not expect victims to resist. The key is to be aggressive and violent and concentrate on what you need to do to distract or disarm the shooter. Use anything at hand to multiply your physical force.

Finally, working as a team and getting others to help will increase your chances of stopping the shooter. Take the lead. Courage, like inertia, is contagious. Again, don't go after an armed gunman unless it is your only option. If you commit, commit fully and with extreme violence.

**(MAKE A NOTE TO YOURSELF: SUGGEST THAT YOUR BOSS INVITE SOMEONE FROM THE LOCAL POLICE FOR A PRESENTATION ON SELF-DEFENSE DURING AN ACTIVE SHOOTER SITUATION.)**

## STAY AWARE IN PUBLIC PLACES



### Look for what is not normal.

A 1970s Clint Eastwood *Dirty Harry* movie illustrates how having a sense of situational awareness can help identify danger. Harry walks into a restaurant where everyone appears tense and quiet. The staff appears and acts fearful. Long story short, Harry realizes that armed robbers are present and shoots the bad guys.

Being situationally aware is like looking both ways before crossing the street. Put away the smartphone and keep your head on a swivel. Hearing gunshots on a college campus, or loud screams at a shopping mall is your “Dirty Harry” alarm. You’ll need an escape path or a safe place to hide.

### Also, know the not-so-obvious exits.

Your first course of action is to run away and get as much space between you and the gunman as you can. Safe drivers always look for an out in case of an unexpected hazard. Practice that while in public. Look for and know where your “outs” are. For example, restaurants and supermarkets have exits past the “employees only” section. Head there if you hear shots fired in front.

The bottom line is that situational awareness will help you execute the run, hide, and fight scenario discussed previously.



## PROTECTING YOUR CHILDREN IN AN ACTIVE SHOOTER SITUATION

Parents can learn one lesson from the 2014 Sandy Hook Elementary School shooting: Children must be mentally prepared to react and know what to do in advance if there is a shooter on the scene.

Teach them that immediate help is unlikely and that indecision is never a good decision. How fast they run and hide are critical. They need to know how others may freeze and why they should not. Tell them to run in a zigzag fashion to make themselves more difficult targets.

### In public with young children

In her blog, *How to Protect Your Children in an Active Shooter Situation*, parenting guru Rachel Norman, stresses that “it is not locked doors, exit locations, or how fast you run” that will increase your chance of survival—although they help, of course. “It is knowing what you would do before you ever get into the situation.”

Rachel’s safety tips while being out and about with small children include:

- If in doubt, leave, and leave quickly. If your lizard brain detects something is not right, just go.
- Make sure your children are hardwired to listen to you and obey. This is crucial. If your children don’t mind you, take gentle steps to impress upon them why they must.
- Create a code word your

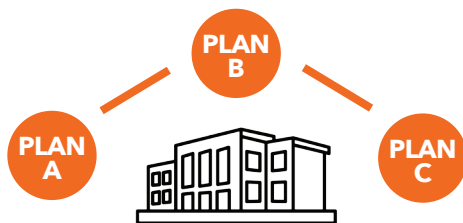




**PRACTICE  
YOUR "CODE  
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children will know that signals danger. Something similar to emergency or danger will work. You don't have to be overly scary, but you can teach your children that using the code word means they must listen carefully and do what you tell them.

- Learn and practice handling all your small children at one time. Grabbing the hands and towing two little ones while holding an infant may be cumbersome, but it beats the alternative.
- Be familiar with baby equipment. If you have to get out fast, will that stroller be an impediment or an aid? How fast can you remove the child from the stroller and run for shelter?



**THE BODY CANNOT GO WHERE THE MIND HAS NOT BEEN." THE KEY IS TO BE MENTALLY PREPARED AND WEIGH YOUR OPTIONS AHEAD OF TIME.**

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## CONCLUSIONS AND TAKEAWAY

The good news is that, statistically speaking, your chances of being involved in an active shooter situation are far less than being in an auto accident, getting cancer or being struck by lightning. The bad news is that those who are victimized typically had no plan. They either froze, ran with the crowd, or hid in places where the shooter knew they would be.

Your single takeaway from this guide should be this: Without mental preparation you cannot begin to react and survive in an active shooter situation. Brad Spicer, founder of SafePlans, has a favorite quote he learned during combat training: "The body cannot go where the mind has not been."

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