

How to Respond to an Active Shooter Event 2020-2021

Prevention versus Response

The Indiana State Police Department encourages “Prevention” over “Response” in dealing with active shooter preparedness. By educating society on the early warning characteristics of an emerging active shooter, law enforcement, educators and or health care workers may be able to intervene and prevent many of the tragedies that have plagued our schools. For more information on the early warning indicators and the development of active shooters, please see the Indiana State Police’s “Unarmed Response to an Active Shooter Event” (URASE) programs posted free on the ISP website.

Disclaimer

Several school safety resources are provided free on the Indiana State Police website. This document is not intended to comprise a complete program for preventing and responding to an active shooter event, nor is it meant to serve as a substitute for expert advice provided by local law enforcement, as well as medical, psychiatric and legal personnel. The material provided in this presentation is only intended to serve as a supplement to your organization’s comprehensive safety program.

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HOW TO RESPOND WHEN AN ACTIVE SHOOTER IS IN YOUR VICINITY

Quickly determine the most reasonable way to protect and preserve your life. When considering the most appropriate action, educators must consider the capabilities of the student population in their charge. Some students and staff may have hearing, physical, emotional and or intellectual functioning conditions that limit their ability to take advantage of all available response options. Specific options will need to be developed to accommodate their needs. A few of the possibilities available to assist Exceptional Learners may be to modify the alarm systems, alter the learning environment through architectural design, create special training programs for staff and or add staff to assist Exceptional Learners in executing the available response options. Administrators must consider the capabilities of those in their charge when modifying learning areas, developing programs, training and directing individuals in the most appropriate response options. Students and educators will likely follow the lead of those they perceive to be in charge. It is critical for the administration to make safety a priority by training and drilling staff frequently.

Prevention

Preparing for Prevention

First, we must understand that “Prevention” is always preferable to “Response.” In order to prevent and or respond appropriately we must be aware of the environment in which we live. If we are not aware of a developing threat, we will be unable to prevent and or respond appropriately to a potentially life-threatening situation.

We must live in a “State of Relaxed Awareness” or “Alertness.” We must be “Situationally Aware” of the threats that are developing in our environment. “Situational Awareness” does not come naturally. We must train ourselves to be aware of a broad spectrum of events that may be developing around us.

We have all witnessed people driving, walking, etc. while texting. These individuals are totally unaware of their environment. They are putting themselves at risk by failing to monitor the environment in which they live.

Situational Awareness

“Situational Awareness” involves knowing what is happening around you in real time. You are “Situational Aware” if you are able to recognize, analyze and anticipate the events that are occurring around you. To be “Situationally Aware” you must stay vigilant to changes in your environment that may signal a developing threat. You must be able to anticipate the impact of events developing around you and mentally formulate actions that will mitigate their potentially negative impact.

Situational Awareness Characteristics

Examples of the characteristics associated with being “Situationally Aware”

- a. Watchfulness: Watchfulness results when you are aware of your surroundings. You are aware of individuals in your environment and their actions. You are trusting your instincts.**
- b. Preparedness: Preparedness results when you rationally formulate solutions to potential aggressive actions that may be directed toward you. For example, you mentally rehearse exits pathways and exits as well as potential access points. You visualize actions that may be taken to respond should a threat develop.**
- c. Relaxed Awareness: You are calm and prepared. You have recognized the potential threat and analyzed your response options. You have prepared yourself to take the necessary action to secure your safety and the safety of those in your charge.**
- d. Anticipatory State: You have mentally rehearsed your potential responses to the anticipated threats and you are mentally prepared to take action. In anticipation of perceived threats, you have formulated solutions to potential threats and you are prepared to carry out the corresponding responses.**

Awareness is Key

Cooper's Color Code

Lt. Col. Jeff Cooper's "Color Code":

Lt. Col. Jeff Cooper's system may assist us in understanding the levels of alertness in which we live our daily lives. Cooper, a retired Marine Lt. Col., developed a system, that was color coded, to represent the levels of awareness that denote a person's mental state as they go about their daily lives. Cooper's work also demonstrates the progression of awareness that must occur as we become prepared to respond to our changing environment in a crisis situation.

Cooper's model identifies levels of awareness by assigning a color (White, Yellow, Orange, and Red). White designates an individual that is relaxed and unaware of their surroundings. Yellow designates an individual that is relaxed but aware of who and what is going on in their environment. In the Orange designation, an individual has identified something of interest that may or may not emerge as a threat. But the individual remains focused until they are satisfied that the conditions of their environment pose no threat. The "Red" designation indicates that the individual has recognized and analyzed the potential threat and is prepared to respond.

Being "Situationally Aware" is critical to identifying the threats that may be present in our environment. In order to take the most appropriate action to prevent and or respond to a threat, we must see it developing. We must be aware of our surroundings.

Common Keys to Prevention

Developing shooters nearly always share their intent with others. Shooters do not just "snap." They most often develop over time. Typically, someone is aware that the shooter is displaying concerning behavioral characteristics. Often, they fail to share that concern with the appropriate authorities.

It is not uncommon for the developing shooter to be spurred into action by events that occur at school or at home. The FBI refers to these events as triggers. A disciplinary action at school and or at home, a conflict with teachers and or classmates, etc. are examples of some these triggers.

Behavioral Keys to Prevention

Developing shooters often display several consistent “Behavioral Indicators” as they develop. It not uncommon for developing shooters to experience “Emotional and Mental Health Issues.” They often seem “out of step” and their behavior sets them apart from their classmates. Simply, they do not “fit in” to their desired peer group and it is apparent. They may demonstrate obsessive interests in “Desensitizing Activities.” As a result their empathy for educators, classmates, animals, etc. may diminish. An extreme fascination for previous active shooters is often noted. Additionally, it is not uncommon for developing shooters to cultivate an obsession for weapons of various kinds.

Response Options

In all response options it is critical to consider the capabilities of the students and staff in your charge. Emotional, physical and intellectual functionality may very well limit the degree to which the total spectrum of response options can be executed. Exceptional Learners, individuals with mobility limitations and those individuals with participation restrictions must be considered when determining the “Response Options” that are available to them.

It must be understood that the “Response Options” (Escape, Lockdown and or Fight) discussed in the ISP program may be exercised in any order. Response options may be repeated as the circumstances of the event dictate. The “Response Options” program is often referred to as being nonlinear. Simply, the options can be exercised in any order.

The option exercised and the order in which the options are exercised is determined by the stimuli of the active shooter event. The location of the shooter, the type of weapon wielded by the threat, the availability of a secure

path to a predetermined safe area, the proximity of the shooter to your location, etc. are just a few examples of the stimuli in an active shooter event.

The Escape Response Option

As educators know all too well, “Active Shooter Events” do not always occur when students are in areas that have substantial and lockable doors (i.e. on the bus, during convocations, at pep sessions, during lunch, at recess, etc.).

“Escape” may be one of your best options. A key component to a successful escape is to be able to identify the location of the shooter. By identifying the location of the shooter, you are more likely to secure a safe path to a pre-identified secure area. Running blindly is not a suitable option. You may run directly into the shooter.

Have a plan of execution and an alternate escape route in mind. Leave your belongings behind. If possible, help others and prevent them from entering an area where the shooter is located. But, do not let these actions slow your escape.

When encountering law enforcement, keep your hands visible, empty and high. You must follow all instructions provided by arriving enforcement. Your goal is to appear as nonthreatening as possible. Responding law enforcement has only a split second to determine if you are a threat.

Lockdown

Lockdown is an excellent option if you are in a location that can be secured. This option has replaced the simple “Hide” option. The “Lockdown” or “Shelter in Place” option adds several critical components to this step in the overall response option strategy.

To initiate this option, you must have a substantial door that can be rapidly secured. A location with a solid and lockable door is a huge advantage. Once in the “Lockdown” location, the door should be barricaded with available

furniture. You must pre-identifying furniture and equipment that can be used to barricade the door. When selecting a “Lockdown Location,” you should keep these factors in mind.

Your goal is to stay out of the line of sight and the line of fire. You are striving for “Cover.” Thick walls, heavy furniture, etc. that can stop a projectile is your (Cover) goal. Once in a secure location, you should silence all electronic devices (cell phones, computers, tablets, pagers, radios, etc.). You must attempt to remain calm and quiet.

If you have a cell phone you may wish to leave a line open to allow the dispatcher to listen as the event unfolds. It is advisable to select several sites to serve as “Lockdown Locations.” The site of the attack may limit your ability to travel to your primary “Lockdown Location.” You should also store supplies in an emergency kit that can support the population that may utilize the location. The contents of the emergency kit should be determined by the needs of the potential population that may seek shelter in the “Lockdown Location.” ISP recommends that schools designate a person to be in charge in the “Lockdown Location.” Most often a backup for the person in charge is recommended as well.

When in the “Lockdown Location,” stay on your feet ready to move if the location is breached. A moving individual presents a much more difficult target for the attacker. ISP does not recommend that individuals seat themselves on the floor.

The Fight Option

It is critical to understand that “Fight Option” is only recommended when no other option is available. Not everyone has the mental, emotional and physical ability to exercise this option. In addition, the “Fight Option” may also be a transitional option. It may be utilized to provide an opportunity to transition to other available options (Escape and or Lockdown).

The Superintendent of the Indiana State Police Doug Carter offers, "If you plan and prepare, you are capable of doing far more than you think you can do."

Preparing for the Fight Option

If you plan to defend yourself and or others, these factors must be addressed:

You must be mentally prepared to fight for your life and perhaps the life of others. You must take a position of advantage (out of the line of sight and out of the line of fire). Pre-identify items that may be used as weapons (chairs, laptop computers, etc.). You must select weapons that you can wield. Act aggressively, commit to your actions.

In preparing for the "Fight Option," you must select a location that increases your chances of success. Law enforcement refers to this strategy as bringing the attacker into your "Circle of Violence." The "Circle of Violence" is defined by ISP as a position in which your improvised weapon becomes effective. In addition, you must focus on taking a position out of the line of sight of the shooter to take advantage of the element of surprise.

You may also initiate your attack by throwing objects to distract the attacker and provide an opportunity for you to escape and or gain the upper hand.

Coordinating your fight response will increase the effectiveness of the option.

The Indiana State Police Department has developed the "Fight Option" for adults. Educators may elect to exercise this option as they secure their safety as well as the safety of the children in their charge. It is the school district's responsibility to determine if they wish to train anyone other than an adult to exercise the "Fight Option."

The ability to execute the "Fight Option" is determined by the physical, emotional and mental capabilities of the individual. Again, it is the school district's decision to determine if they wish to include any individual other than an adult staff member in the execution of "Fight Option."

HOW TO RESPOND WHEN LAW ENFORCEMENT ARRIVES

Law enforcement's purpose is to stop the active shooter as soon as possible. Typically, law enforcement will proceed directly to the area in which the last shots were heard.

Officers may wear regular patrol uniforms, external bulletproof vests, Kevlar helmets, and other tactical equipment. The point being, law enforcement may look different than we expect. However they will always display a badge and identify themselves as law enforcement.

Officers may be armed with rifles, shotguns, handguns, etc. Officers may use pepper spray or tear gas to control the situation. Officers may shout commands, and may push individuals to the ground for their safety. Your goal is to remain calm and follow the officers' instructions.

Put down any items in your hands (i.e. cell phones, pagers, book bags, jackets, etc.). Immediately, raise your hands and spread fingers. You must keep your hands empty, high and visible. Avoid making quick movements toward officers such as reaching for them or holding on to them. Avoid pointing, screaming, and/or yelling. You must follow all commands given by law enforcement.

On the Indiana State Police website, a list of questions has been developed by 911 operators. This list may serve as a guide to better prepare you for the type of information typically needed by responding law enforcement officers and or 911 dispatchers.