

Active Shooting Events in a School Environment: Choosing to Change the Ending.

“You can't go back and change the beginning, but you can start where you are and change the ending.”

-C.S. Lewis

In an active shooting event you will have choices. This is about making choices to keep you and your students alive. By making the right choices when an active shooter comes to your school, you are literally choosing life over death for your students and yourself.

People during in an active shooting event will think about one of two things over and over. They will either think, “*I am going to die*” or they think, “*the police are going to come rescue me*”. Rarely do people involved in an active shooting event think about rescuing themselves.

The sad truth about active shooting events is once the shooting begins, someone is shot, on average, about every 20 seconds until it stops. Thinking “*I am going to die*” accomplishes nothing to help you or your students, it paralyzes your ability to have rational thoughts, and will increase the chances you and your students will be shot and killed. The belief “*the police are going to come rescue me*” is an unrealistic expectation which is not based in fact. Analysis of all active shootings in a school environment in the United States since 1970 show nearly all victims are injured and killed well before police are able to arrive on scene, engage the shooter, and end the carnage.

No rational person likes to think about evil coming to their school and murdering their students and staff. For many school administrators and teachers, the thought of a gunman shooting their kids and leaving behind a bloody, horrible carnage is unthinkable. Developing an effective plan to deal with an active shooter requires you to think about what you might consider to be unthinkable for you. By choosing to not think about an active shooting event, you are choosing to be a victim. You are also selecting that fate for your students as well.

Your Best Choice in an Active Shooting Event

"*The truth is what works,*" said William James. So what works in an active shooting event? Once an active shooting event begins, the best way to survive is to be prepared to rescue yourself and teach your students and staff to do the same. The mantra RUN/HIDE/BARRICADE and FIGHT is a simple and highly effective way to save your life and the lives of your students and staff. It is a flexible, proven response to the rapidly evolving, short duration, high intensity violent environment active shooters create when they come into your school.

The basic principles of RUN/HIDE/BARRICADE and FIGHT can be taught in as little as two hours to teachers and students. It empowers them to think and act effectively during what is likely to be the most dangerous event they will ever face. It gives teachers and students a life saving set of proven skills which work. It teaches them they have choices and they can choose to RUN/HIDE/BARRICADE and FIGHT and not be a victim.

RUN/HIDE/BARRICADE and FIGHT

RUN - Quickly evacuating from the area of the threat and going to one of at least two secure, pre-planned rally points is the single most effective way to remove yourself, your staff, and students from the danger zone of an active shooter. Distance is your friend. If you are not in the general area of an active shooter, he can not shoot you. Teach your students and staff to run fast in a zig-zag fashion rather than a straight line to the rally points. Students who have books or ballistic protection in their back packs should be wearing them. Once your students and staff begin running to the rally points, they must not stop for any reason.

HIDE - Hide [Lockdown] only works if you have a secure location to hide from a determined active shooter. Know the difference between concealment and cover and teach your students to use it to their advantage. Concealment stops you from being seen. Cover stops bullets and also keeps you from being seen by an active shooter. Think heavy and dense material. Concrete and steel work; drywall does not. Choose cover over concealment. Silence your cell phones.

BARRICADE- If you and your students choose to Hide - **You must barricade in place**. This means using whatever you have at hand to slow or prevent an active shooter from penetrating the area where you and your students have decide to hide. Very few classrooms are built to stop a determined active shooter. However, every school classroom contains multiple options you can use to slow and stop an active shooter: Lock the door, cover the glass window, slide the heaviest object [usually a desk] in front of the door. Secure your students and yourself behind bookcases. Learn to construct emergency ballistic shields. Have your students cluster near the windows or the secondary door and prepare to evacuate should the active shooter be able to enter the room. You and your students should be on your hands and knees rather than lying on the floor and near secondary exit points should the shooter breach the room.

FIGHT - You may be the primary target of an active shooter or you may be proximate to the unfolding active shooter event and may have no choice but to fight. Statically, active shooters are paper tigers with no will to engage an aggressive, determined foe. Think conventional and improvised weapons: Pepper Spray, Tasers, firearms, if you and your staff are trained to use them. Learn how to improvise weapons from what is available. Fire extinguishers are ideal as improvised weapons. When used correctly, fire extinguishers take away two things an active shooter needs to kill you: his ability to see and his ability breathe. Other possible improvised weapons include broom handles, spray bottles of chemical cleaner, shears, pencils taped together, hand tools and sports equipment. A gun can only be shot in one direction at a time. Fight as a group and don't stop until your attacker is no longer a threat.

What Doesn't Work and Why

"If the only tool you have is a hammer, you tend treat every problem as a nail"

-Abraham Maslo

Lockdown during an active shooter event is a one trick pony. It is only viable if you have very secure, bullet proof classrooms that can keep an active shooter or shooters from entering the classroom or shooting through the walls.

This method will only work if the instructions to lockdown are given and received by all teachers and students. Lockdown becomes confusing and problematic when a fire alarm is pulled during an active shooter event which very often happens. Lockdown is not effective if an active shooter begins his attack in a gym, auditorium, or lunchroom when a large group or the whole school is assembled.

Lockdown during active shooting events has a place but should be utilized within the context of a well developed safety plan which incorporates the concept of RUN/HIDE/BARRICADE and FIGHT.

No One is Ever the Same After an Active Shooting Event

William James also taught us *“wrong and pain and death must be fairly met and overcome or the sting remains essentially unbroken.”*

Interviews with those who survive active shooting events clearly reflect the severe psychological trauma experienced in the weeks, months and years following the event. Two of the most common statements you hear from those involved in school shootings are *“I felt so helpless”* and *“I was just waiting for him to come shoot me”*. Most students, teachers and administrators will have long term symptoms of PTSD, including flashbacks during the day and nightmares where they relive over and over the helplessness and terror they experienced during the active shooting event.

We live in a society today that teaches us to be victims. We see the victim mentality all around us. Many people expect others, including the government, to solve their problems. Learned helplessness is a term that has somehow entered our vocabulary.

But we were once a prepared society. We accepted responsibility and took initiative and solved the issues and challenges we faced. We taught our children to be prepared, to take action, and to not be helpless victims. If there was ever a time and place to be prepared, to take action, to not be helpless, and to not be a victim, it is when an active shooter enters your school environment.

