

PREVENTING AND PREPARING FOR AN ACTIVE SHOOTER INCIDENT:

A Fact Sheet For School Employees



SCHOOL ACTION FOR SAFETY AND HEALTH

Labor Occupational Health Program, University of California,
Berkeley Commission on Health and Safety and Workers'
Compensation

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The likelihood of experiencing an active shooter incident is low but when it happens, it is devastating. School shooters can be students or adults from the community, they may be connected to the school community or be strangers. This fact sheet will focus on preventing students from becoming violent.

There are many causes for school shootings. School environments where bullying, harassment and other mistreatment are common can lead some students to pursue direct retaliation through gun violence or other physical attacks. For this reason, schools should balance a security strategy, including hiring security personnel, with building a positive school climate.ⁱ

While each active shooter situation is different, there are best practices that can help prevent or reduce the impact of these incidents.



How often do active shooter incidents happen in schools?

A 2017 California State Auditor report explains that K-12 schools and higher education institutions are the second most common location, after businesses, for active shooter incidents in the U.S. as well as within California.ⁱⁱ As of February 1, 2018, California schools are required by the law AB 1747 to create a Comprehensive School Safety Plan,ⁱⁱⁱ a part of which is developing a “tactical response plan.” The tactical response plan outlines steps to safeguard students and staff, secure the impacted area of the school and apprehend the perpetrator.

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What can schools do to prevent active shooter incidents?

1. Create a healthy school climate.

Take a balanced approach to safety. In response to school shootings, many districts have invested in security systems and staff rather than in mental health resources. However, in some cases, the shooters have been able to bypass a school's security system and carry out the crime.^{iv} A balanced approach to safety includes addressing bullying, harassment and physical violence in schools in addition to the security systems and staff.^v

Work to create a healthy school climate. Teachers and other staff should continue to make efforts to get to know students, understand what they may be experiencing, and connect them to any necessary support.

Involve students. Students are aware of social dynamics and can intervene in a way that adults cannot. Social media posts are an example of where students might be aware of evidence that someone is imagining and planning a shooting, and whether they have access to firearms. If schools invest the time and effort to creating an environment where students feel respected, are encouraged to play a role in prevention, and have positive relationships with adults at school, they are more likely to share critical information about potential violence.

Students can also influence each other with their behavior. Educators can work with students to make schools safe, respectful spaces for everyone. Schools can train students to speak up and intervene effectively if a peer is being aggressive or mean, to include isolated students and to diffuse everyday conflicts. Understanding and encouraging students to become peace-makers will improve students' emotional intelligence, communication skills, and the overall climate of a school.^{vi}

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2. Learn to recognize potential threats.

Know the signs. Often there are many signs that are missed or unreported before an active shooter incident that, if recognized and addressed, could have prevented the tragedy. Forensic experts use the term, “leakage” to explain that 80% of shooters tell someone before they initiate the incident; 62% tell more than one person.^{vii}

It is important to know that warning signs alone do not mean that someone is planning a violent act. But when several warning signs accumulate over time it can mean that someone is on a pathway toward violence.



Signs can include:

- An obsession with guns and mass shootings
- Being a target of long term bullying
- Extreme isolation or social withdrawal from real or perceived actions of others
- Excessively aggressive response to seemingly minor issues — a sign of a lack of self-regulation
- Easy access to firearms or bragging about access to firearms
- Overt threats of violence (spoken, written, pictures, videos, gestures).^{viii}

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Set up a threat assessment team. Threat assessment teams are made up of mental health and safety professionals. Training for such teams should incorporate recognizing implicit bias and ways to safeguard against targeting students by race, religion, cognitive ability or other characteristics.

Threat assessment by a trained team can help identify a would-be shooter, evaluate the situation and intervene before the escalation of the threat. Intervention can include connecting the student to healthy hobbies, sports or mental health professionals.^{ix}

What can schools do to prepare for active shooter incidents?

Create a plan that gives school staff options. To best prepare students and staff, schools should create an Emergency Action Plan.

Provide students with training on what to do during an incident. Cover the following information:

California State University's short video that explains the "Run-Hide-Fight." strategy (see *summary on next page*). Staff should watch this video and share it with students to explain this strategy.^x

Host practice drills. Once a plan is in place, practice drills should be conducted with students. Practicing the plan will help identify gaps that can be addressed before an emergency situation occurs.^{xi}

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What can school employees do during an active shooter incident?

If you are in an active shooter situation, follow the Run, Hide, Fight strategy:

Run, Hide, Fight Strategy for Active Shooter Incidents



RUN

- If you hear a noise that sounds like a gunshot, leave. Do not wait for confirmation.
- If there is an escape path, do your best to escape.*
- Take others with you but don't stay behind if they do not want to run.
- Leave your belongings, except your cell phone. If you have anything in your hands the police may think you are the shooter.



HIDE

- If it is not possible for you to evacuate you should find a place to hide.
- Lock and/or blockade the door. Do not trap yourself or restrict your movements.
- Concealing yourself behind a large filing cabinet is better than taking cover under a table, as the cabinet can protect you from bullets but being under a table would not.
- Turn off the lights.
- Silence your cell phone.



FIGHT

- As a last resort, and if your life is in danger, fight the shooter.
- Improvise weapons from fire extinguishers, chairs, and scissors. Use these commonly available items to disable or disarm the shooter.
- Act as aggressively as possible against the shooter.

** In the Columbine High School shooting, 10 of the 12 people killed had remained "locked down" in a library that had a backdoor through which everyone could have escaped. If possible, run. It is the best way to improve your chance of survival.*

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Tell staff and students what to expect from the police. Active shooter incidents usually last between 5-7 minutes. The incident may be over by the time police arrive. Once police are on the scene, they may mistake innocent bystanders for the shooter and so staff and students should always follow police orders. Inform staff and students that police will not stop to help injured people. Emergency medical services will follow the police and take care of the injured.

What can school employees do after an active shooter incident?

Individuals who have lived through a traumatic event should consider seeking professional help for themselves and their loved ones. The effects of trauma can be long-term.

Resources for more information

- Department of Homeland Security: <https://www.ready.gov/>
- Department of Homeland Security: <https://www.dhs.gov/active-shooter-preparedness>
- California Department of Education: <https://www.cde.ca.gov/ls/ss/cp/ActiveShooter.asp>
- Readiness and Emergency Management for Schools: <http://rems.ed.gov/K12RespondToActiveShooter.aspx>
- Community Matters: <http://community-matters.org/>
- Sandy Hook Promise, Say Something: <https://www.saysomething.net/>
- US Mass Shootings, 1982-2019: Data from Mother Jones' Investigation: <https://www.motherjones.com/politics/2012/12/mass-shootings-mother-jones-full-data/>
- California State University Run.Hide.Fight Strategy Video

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School Action for Safety and Health (SASH) Program

Do you have a question about health and safety issues faced by school employees or are you interested in a health and safety training for school employees? Contact the SASH Resource Center at 510-643-8483 or visit us online at the School Action for Safety and Health website.

ENDNOTES

- i. Rick Phillips. *Security Is Not Safety: America's Urgent Need to Transform School Culture to Stop Violence*. Community Matters, 2018, <http://www.sia-jpa.org/resources/hot-topics/article-security-is-not-safety/>
 - ii. Howle, Elaine M. *School Violence Prevention School Districts, County Offices of Education, and the State Must Do More to Ensure That School Safety Plans Help Protect Students and Staff During Emergencies*. California State Auditor, 2017, bsa.ca.gov/pdfs/reports/2016-136.pdf.
 - iii. "Bill Text - AB-1747 School Safety Plans." *California Legislative Information*, 23 Aug. 2018, leginfo.ca.gov/faces/billTextClient.xhtml?bill_id=201720180AB1747.
 - iv. Sanchez, Claudio. "What Decades Of Covering School Shootings Has Taught Me." NPR, 22 Feb. 2018, www.npr.org/sections/ed/2018/02/22/587334597/what-decades-of-covering-school-shootings-has-taught-me.
 - v. Rick Phillips. *Security Is Not Safety: America's Urgent Need to Transform School Culture to Stop Violence*. Community Matters, 2018, <http://www.sia-jpa.org/resources/hot-topics/article-security-is-not-safety/>.
- Ibid.
- vi. Follman, Mark, et al. "Inside the Race to Stop the next Mass Shooter." *Mother Jones*, 1 Feb. 2018, www.motherjones.com/politics/2015/10/mass-shootings-threat-assessment-shooter-fbi-columbine/.
 - vii. Sandy Hook Promise, 2016, *Know The Signs*. https://nationalsave.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/SHP_Know_the_Signs_Guide.pdf.
 - ix. Follman, Mark, et al. "Mass Shootings: Maybe What We Need Is a Better Mental-Health Policy." *Mother Jones*, 25 June 2017, www.motherjones.com/politics/2012/11/jared-loughner-mass-shootings-mental-illness/.
 - x. California State University. *Run.Hide.Fight*, YouTube, 15 Feb. 2018, www.youtube.com/watch?v=VUErkf3XEEs.
 - xi. Department of Homeland Security, 2008, Active Shooter How to Respond. www.dhs.gov/xlibrary/assets/active_shooter_booklet.pdf

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