

Active Shooter

Active Shooter - an individual actively engaged in killing or attempting to kill people in a confined and populated area; in most cases, active shooters use firearms(s) and there is no pattern or method to their selection of victims. (Source: US Department of Homeland Security, *Active Shooter: How to Respond* booklet)

It is a situation we hear almost on a weekly basis but we never hope to have to experience, an active shooter situation. There are many reasons why individuals take out their anger on others in the form of this type of violence. Active shooter situations begin at times with no warning and escalate to levels that cause mass confusion. An active shooter situation typically lasts no longer than ten to fifteen minutes, however these few minutes may be the most critical time you may ever experience. Some of the first reactions to an active shooter are disbelief, fear, and uncertainty *if you are unprepared*. Know how to respond in the event an active shooter is on campus. While we don't want you to live your life in fear, you should know at the very least actions that could keep you and others from harm and can save your life. The better prepared you are mentally the more likely you are able to keep yourself safe.

Preparation

By preparing yourself in the event of an active shooter, it does not mean like we have mentioned before to expect the worst every day, but it does mean to be aware of your surroundings and situations you are in. Some things you can do to help you be prepared is

- Know at least two routes to all entrances and exits (if available) to the buildings you frequent on a regular basis and use these routes so that you are familiar with them not just aware of them.
- Know of hiding places in these buildings you frequent where you can effectively conceal yourself in if you must hide in an active shooter situation.
- Be aware of potential items you can use as a weapon if you are confronted with an active shooter and have to defend yourself.
- Be aware of your surroundings every minute! If you are listening to music using headphones or ear buds, have one ear open to outside noises so that you are cognizant of the situation around you.
- Sign up for emergency text messaging via BraveWeb. Even though an active shooter may not be in your immediate vicinity but on campus, you will be better prepared as to how to act and keep yourself and others safe. Emergency alerts can be also found on UNCP's Live Safe app you can download onto your smartphone. Also heed official email notifications of any emergency on campus and take action based on these notifications.

Onset and During an Active Shooter Situation

If an active shooter is on campus or in the immediate area, your preparation will help you to act accordingly to stay safe. You first must be aware of the immediate situation at hand. Have you heard shots fired nearby? Do you see people running? Which way? Where from? Have your alerts told you anything that could be of *immediate* use to you right then? Are you in a position where you can get

outside immediately or have to navigate through hallways and/or stairwells? Take all of this in account before you act. It will take only seconds for your mind to process everything and by doing this assessment you have a better chance of making decisions to stay safe. You have three options at this point of discovering or becoming aware of an active shooter in the area; **RUN, HIDE, OR FIGHT.**

Run

- Running is the first and best option, *if it is safe to do so.*
- You need not use doors and traditional entrances and exits to a building to make your escape. If you are on the first floor and the windows can open to an escape route, barricade the door to the room you are in first then exit out of the window.
- Leave your belongings behind; purses and book bags become impediments to escape. The active shooter is not interested in taking your items. These items can be replaced if later to be discovered missing, you can't be replaced!
- While exiting out of a building by stairwells and hallways you may encounter injured or frightened individuals. As difficult it may be, if an injured person or frightened person is going to hamper your efforts to leave safely, you may have to leave them. With frightened individuals try to get them to go with you but do not spend precious minutes convincing them. If you must leave them, try to find a hiding spot for them immediately nearby so they can conceal themselves. For injured people, do not attempt to move them.
- Once outside, try to get the attention of others who appear to be entering the building but are unaware of an active shooter in the building in the immediate area.
- Run as far away from the building and/or area as possible. Make progressive distance by using cover as much as possible as you distance yourself from the threat. Don't run out in the open for too long.
- If you find cover just outside the building, stay away from windows where you can be seen by the shooter who is still inside.
- If you are outside and in an area of cover but do not know if you should run from your cover, make a quick assessment again. Where are the shots coming from? Do you see people running? Where? Are there shots immediately heard once you seen the people run or have they made it safely away? This might be an opportunity for you to join this group that has made it to safety. If you hear shots fired as they are running, hide until you can make the assessment that you can safely move again.
- When it is safe to do so call 911. Remember that the phone lines may be flooded with a high call volume from people who may be trapped inside a building still. If you cannot get through to 911 that is a good sign that law enforcement is aware of the situation. At this point you should still further distance yourself from the threat.

HIDE

- If circumstances prevent you from running away such as the presence of the active shooter immediately in your area, your second option is to *hide*.
- At the first awareness of the active shooter, assess what you can or can't do. The first step to hiding is to *barricade* yourself from the active shooter. If the door has a lock, lock it. If the door is equipped with a "self-closing" arm that is at the top of the door, secure the two arms together by using a belt, cord, long purse strap, or any binding material to make the door difficult to open or appear locked.
- Make it a group effort. If there is more than one person in a room, a lot can be accomplished in a short time to barricade if more than one person is doing all the work.
- Use heavy objects such as desks, cabinets and other furniture to place against the door to discourage entry. Stack items on top of each other if possible. If you have multiple desks or tables in a room, line them up from the door to the wall opposite the door to make a "brace" that prevents entry.
- Turn off the lights if possible lower or close blinds to allow as little of outdoor light to come in the room. Make the room as dark as possible.
- Silence your cell phones. Any little noise can tip off an active shooter revealing your hiding spot or your presence in a room.
- Do not trap or restrict your movement to prevent you from making an escape if conditions exist to safely do so.
- DO NOT huddle in one part of the room. You are making yourself a bigger target. Spread out throughout the room and outside the line of sight. Try to hide behind large objects in the room.
- Remain quiet. You may be in a room with a person who is overcome with fright. Have someone console and quiet that person in a hidden area in the room.
- Dial 911 if possible. Provide emergency communications with as much information as possible such as location of the shooter, physical description of the shooter, type of weapon(s), number of shooters and number of people injured based on your knowledge. Don't be in hysterics when speaking. If you cannot convey the information effectively, let someone else speak to emergency communications that is calmer.
- If you cannot speak because it might reveal your location, keep the line to 911 open so that communications may be able to hear the events going on.
- Do not slip out notes from under the door indicating you are all right or injured or other message. That just lets the shooter that someone is in the room. Remember your efforts mentioned above were to make you "invisible." Don't defeat those efforts by letting the shooter know you are in the room.
- Prepare yourself for possible entry of the shooter. Have a weapon or distraction object in your hand already so you can fight at the best possible moment.

FIGHT

- This is the last option. If you were not able to run from the threat safely, and your hiding spot or barricaded area was breached by the active shooter your last option is to *fight*.
- If you have a weapon in hand already as mentioned in the last point in the *hide* section, you are better prepared to defend yourself and others.
- A weapon can be anything. A fire extinguisher, scissors, chair, books, book bags, knives found in a break room drawer, trash cans, any object that can be thrown and can distract even if for one second and alter the person's aim on you or others.
- There is safety in numbers! If you must fight and there are multiple people in the room, your chances of subduing the active shooter are greater than a one-on-one fight. Throw as many objects at the person upon entry. Then make a second attack. Do whatever it takes to disarm the individual and incapacitate him so that you neutralize the situation. Commit yourself to fight.
- If the active shooter has been overcome in the room, close and secure the door again to prevent any other potential threats from coming in.
- If physically able to do so, use many people as possible to restrict movement of the active shooter.
- Try to notify 911 of the situation in the room. Let them know the building, floor, and room number you are in. Tell emergency communications you have barricaded the door again and have them stay on the line until law enforcement arrives at your room for assurance that those outside are in fact law enforcement.

Law Enforcement Response

- Although an active shooter event lasts only 10-15 minutes on average, it may seem like a lifetime. It may seem like help will never come, but it is on the way. Remember that time appears slow in stressful situations. Work to keep yourself safe in the meantime.
- Once law enforcement arrives on the scene, they have at times limited information or at times unreliable information due to the number of reports coming in on the situation. Officers will be armed with weapons in hand; they may yell orders at you. Do not take offense, do as they say.
- If you are running towards law enforcement, keep your arms up, hands spread.
- Lay down any items you are carrying.
- Don't make sudden movements toward them.
- Avoid pointing, or screaming or yelling.
- Do not impede their movements, move in the direction they are coming from, safety is in that direction.
- Know that the first wave of law enforcement will not help wounded people. Their mission is to neutralize the threat. A second wave of law enforcement will respond to the wounded.

After

- There will still be a lot of confusion after the situation has ended. Phone lines will be tied up, and response and recovery efforts will still be taking place.
- Stay outside the perimeter of where the situation happened at. Obey law enforcement orders. It is *very unlikely* that you will be able to enter a building where the situation occurred at to get your belongings so do not try to convince them to let you enter.
- If you are injured, seek medical attention or have someone find attention for you.
- Try to find a group or an area (assembly area) set up by University officials or by law enforcement that has a check in station so that you are accounted for. Remain there until you have been released.
- If the phone lines are open, call a family member or friend to let them know you are safe and where you are at. Have them relay the message to others so you do not tie up the lines.

For additional resources on active shooter preparedness and response check out these resources:

Educational video on Run, Hide, Fight, developed by the City of Houston, Texas.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5VcSwejU2D0>

US Department of Homeland Security booklet on active shooter preparedness and response

<https://www.dhs.gov/active-shooter-preparedness>