

Active assailant

How to prepare and respond



The first seconds of an active assailant situation are critical. You need to be prepared and able to act decisively, not scared, in the event of an active assailant situation. Understand that you have the authority to take immediate action to protect yourself.

Active assailant in your vicinity

Run if an accessible escape path exists

- Have an escape route and plan in mind
- Move away from gunfire
- Leave your belongings behind
- Keep your hands visible

Hide if escape is not possible

- Find an area to hide out of the assailant's view
- Secure and barricade the entry door to your hiding place
- Turn off lights and avoid casting shadows under the door
- Silence your cell phone and remain quiet & still
- Do not stand directly in front of the door in case the shooter fires through the door
- Identify a secondary exit (e.g., door, window) so that you can get out if needed

Fight only as the last resort

- You have the right to defend yourself if your life is in imminent danger
- Act immediately as timing is critical. The decision to fight is yours and yours alone to make
- Act with physical aggression and try to disrupt and/or incapacitate the assailant

Responding to law enforcement

Remember, law enforcement is there to neutralize or eliminate the immediate threat; not to provide medical care. When law enforcement arrives:

- Remain calm and follow officer's instructions immediately
- Put down any items in your hands (e.g., bags, jackets)
- Raise your hands and spread your fingers. Always keep your hands visible
- Avoid quick movements toward officers, such as holding on to them for safety
- Avoid pointing, screaming or yelling
- Do not stop to ask officers for help or direction when evacuating
- Proceed in the direction that law enforcement is entering from or where they direct you

If you contact 911, be prepared to:

- Dial 911 only when it is safe to do so
- Silence your phone and keep line open they can hear what is going on
- Provide information such as location; number of assailants; physical description; type of weapons; direction of movement, and number of potential victims

Tips to help you prepare

Active assailant incidents are unpredictable and seldom expected. It can be a disgruntled employee, potential loan applicant, a member of your credit union, or just someone random with little or no connection. It's essential to be educated and know how to respond.

No one ever thinks it will happen to them – but what if it does?

Create mental action scripts

Be prepared with a mental rehearsal plan that includes different scenarios regarding how to respond in the event of a variety of crises. Follow a mental prompt like “If [blank] happens, then I will do [blank].”

Prepare to act not react

Waiting to hear whether an incident is confirmed or not could be the difference between a lifesaving decision and an unfortunate hesitation.

If you hear a sound that you perceive to be a gunshot, act as if it is a gunshot until proven otherwise. It is perfectly acceptable for employees to individually initiate lockdowns or run-hide-fight.

Take sound seriously

Recognizing the sound of weapons can help you respond relatively quickly and move away from an unsafe location. Know how to recognize an active assailant or the sounds of an active shooter. Avoid denial or overreaction and understand that gunfire has many sounds.

Prioritize office roadblocks

Make it a priority to put as many “office roadblocks” as possible between yourself and the assailant. Active assailants often seek out easy targets of opportunity, where there are little to no barricades that will limit their movement, and little to no supervision or confrontation that will restrict or end their actions.

Practice lockdown & barricade

The first time you consider how to lockdown your occupied space should not be during an active assailant situation.

If your plan relies on fine motor skills (e.g., placing a key in the door keyhole and turning, precise movements with your fingers such as tying rope or computer cable to the doorknob), you may find yourself moving too slow to be effective.

Plan how to barricade

Pre-planning lockdown for each occupied space, including identifying the objects that will be utilized, can be key. Always use objects of substantial size and weight when barricading.

Make it appear that no one is there

When hiding and/or barricading, turn off lights, silence your cell phones, keep quiet, and avoid casting shadows under the door. Do not stand directly in front of the door in case the shooter fires through the door. Always identify a secondary exit (e.g., door, window) so that you can get out if needed.

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