



ACTIVE SHOOTER PREPAREDNESS: A RISK MANAGEMENT PERSPECTIVE

Active shooter events remain one of the most challenging threats for organizations nationwide, as recent incidents across the country continue to demonstrate how narrow the window is for prevention and how quickly these situations escalate. Analyses of past events around the nation show recurring patterns—behavioral red flags, missed opportunities for intervention, and rapid escalation—that reinforce the importance of proactive risk identification, structured response systems, and staff training.

Recognizing Pre Incident Indicators

Effective risk mitigation begins long before an incident occurs. External case reviews frequently show that perpetrators exhibit behavioral, historical, or situational warning signs, many of which go unrecognized without a formal system for assessment and escalation. Key indicators include:

- **History of violence:** Past aggressive incidents must be consistently documented and clearly communicated across treatment teams to avoid critical information being lost as cases transition between staff.
- **Odd or escalating behavior:** Increases in agitation, frustration, or behavior deviations from the individual's norm may signal rising instability.
- **Changes in personal circumstances or treatment patterns:** Missed medication, long appointment delays, or major stressors can elevate risk.
- **Missed opportunities for intervention:** In numerous external cases, staff observed concerning behavior but lacked a structured process for evaluating its significance or escalating it for review.

Risk managers should work to ensure staff have both the training and institutional support to identify, document, and act upon these early warning signs.

Response Strategies: RUN, HIDE, FIGHT

When an active shooter situation unfolds, response time is extremely limited. Preparedness directly influences survivability.

RUN

Escape is the preferred option when it is safe to do so. Before running, staff must quickly assess whether an immediate exit is nearby and whether movement would expose them to the aggressor. If a safe, close-proximity escape route exists, evacuate immediately using primary or alternate routes, keeping in mind which paths offer the least visibility and exposure.

If running would place you in the shooter's line of sight or requires navigating open, unsecured space, hiding becomes the safer choice.

HIDE

If evacuation isn't feasible, securing a hiding place can create crucial delay. Locked or barricaded rooms, silenced devices, and minimal noise significantly reduce detection. External incident reports have shown shooters bypassing locked or fortified rooms in search of easier access.

While hiding, you should also prepare to defend yourself if discovered. This includes identifying an improvised weapon, preferably one that can strike from a distance or be thrown. Examples include:

- Fire extinguishers
- Heavy office equipment (staplers, hole punchers, tape dispensers)
- Chairs
- Coffee pots or thermoses
- Scissors or metal office tools
- Monitor arms or keyboards
- Books, binders, or other dense objects that can be thrown

Position yourself so you have access to these items and a clear line of sight to the door, giving you a tactical advantage if the shooter attempts entry.

FIGHT

This last resort option may disrupt the shooter's actions, create delay and potentially prevent further casualties. Fighting is inherently high risk, but resistance—especially using improvised weapons—can buy time for others to escape and for law enforcement to intervene. The objective is to overwhelm, distract, or disable the attacker long enough to interrupt their actions.

Active Shooter Drills: The Right Way and the Wrong Way

Conducting active shooter drills is an essential part of preparedness, but the method used to conduct these drills significantly impacts their effectiveness, employee trust, and organizational liability. Done correctly, drills enhance readiness and reinforce safe decision making. Done poorly, they can create unnecessary trauma, confusion, or operational disruption.

The Right Way

Effective drills are announced, coordinated, and psychologically safe. Best practice components include:

- Inform all staff ahead of time. Drills should never be a surprise; advance notification reduces anxiety, prevents misinterpretation, and ensures staff can fully participate without fear.
- Aim for 100% participation. Everyone should practice the decision-making skills emphasized in training, including assessing escape routes, identifying hiding locations, and understanding their options.
- Use the principles taught in TCRMF's Active Shooter Defense Training
 - Run if it is immediately safe to do so.
 - Hide behind a locked or barricaded door if escape is not safe.

- Do not engage or fight the role player portraying the shooter during a drill.
- Use signage such as “In Session”. When staff are meeting with a consumer during a drill, a simple sign helps observers understand why that individual is not participating in the same way as others.
- Inform and accommodate consumers. Consumers should be told a drill will occur and offered the option to reschedule their appointment to avoid unnecessary distress or confusion.
- Invite participation from the local police department. Involving law enforcement promotes coordination, improves response familiarity, and allows agencies to provide constructive feedback on facility layout and procedure.

When handled with transparency and preparation, drills strengthen staff confidence and reinforce organizational resilience.

The Wrong Way

Some drill methods create unnecessary risk, emotional harm, or legal exposure. Avoid practices such as:

- Unannounced drills should be avoided. Surprise simulations can induce panic, misinterpretation, or physical injury, and can be mistaken for a real threat.
- Using tactical gear, fake guns, or mock weapons should be avoided as these elements can retraumatize individuals, escalate fear, and create serious risk if misidentified by staff or visitors.
- Aggressive or confrontational role playing should be avoided. Staff should never be subjected to intimidation, shouting, or physical approaches during drills. These tactics do not enhance preparedness and may violate workplace safety policies.

Improper drills can harm employees, damage organizational trust, and create liability. Structured, transparent, well-planned drills—grounded in the principles of RUN, HIDE, FIGHT—provide the safest and most effective path to readiness.

Building a Culture of Prevention

Active shooter preparedness is a critical component of organizational risk management, and the lessons learned from incidents across the nation underscore the importance of early intervention, structured prevention systems, and well-practiced response strategies. By recognizing behavioral indicators, strengthening communication channels, conducting safe and effective drills, and empowering staff with clear guidance on when to run, hide, or fight, organizations can significantly enhance their ability to protect employees, consumers, and visitors. Building a culture of readiness is not a one-time effort—it requires ongoing training, coordination, and reinforcement to ensure everyone is equipped to respond effectively when every second matters.

If your Center would like assistance evaluating current practices, improving emergency response processes, or scheduling Active Shooter Defense training, TCRMF Risk Control staff are available for consultation and support. Members can also contact Jeremy Wade at jeremy.wade@sedgwick.com for additional guidance or to schedule training sessions tailored to their facility’s needs.