



**Homeland  
Security**

# Active Shooter Attacks

Security Awareness for Soft Targets and Crowded Places

An active shooter is an individual actively engaged in killing or attempting to kill people in a confined and populated area. In most cases, active shooters use firearm(s) and have no pattern or method to their selection of victims, which creates an unpredictable and quickly evolving situation that can result in loss of life and injury. Other active shooter attack methods may also include bladed weapons, vehicles, and improvised explosive devices. While law enforcement is usually required to end an active shooter situation, individuals can take steps to prepare mentally and physically for the possibility of this type of event occurring in order to save lives.

## Be Alert to Signs of Trouble

While active shooter situations are often unpredictable, paying careful attention to warning signs could go a long way in mitigating a potential incident. Some shooters demonstrate progressively escalating risk factors in their mindsets and behaviors that characterize them as violent prior to an attack. Recognizing these warning signs and reaching out for help could bring at-risk individuals to the attention of law enforcement sooner and prevent a future attack.

### Potential warning signs include:

- Increasingly erratic, unsafe, or aggressive behaviors.
- Hostile behavior based on claims of injustice or perceived wrongdoing.
- Drug and alcohol abuse.
- Claims of marginalization or distancing from friends and colleagues.
- Changes in performance at work.
- Sudden and dramatic changes in home life or in personality.
- Financial difficulties.
- Pending civil or criminal litigation.
- Observable grievances and making statements of retribution.

### You can help ensure the safety of those around you.

- Be aware of drastic changes in attitude toward others.
- Take note of any escalations in behavior and report to supervisor.
- Provide any information that may help facilitate intervention and mitigate potential risks.

## FACTS & EVENTS

- In March 2018, three people were killed by an armed gunman during a hostage situation at Yountville Veterans Home in Napa County, California.
- In February 2018, 17 people including students and teachers were killed and 17 more were wounded when a gunman opened fire inside Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida.
- In October 2017, 58 people were killed and 851 were injured when a gunman opened fire from the window of a hotel room on a crowd of concert goers at the Route 91 Harvest Music Festival on the Las Vegas Strip in Nevada.
- In June 2016, 49 people were killed and 58 were injured when a gunman opened fire inside Pulse nightclub in Orlando, Florida.
- In December 2012, 20 children between six and seven years old as well as six adult staff members were killed when an armed gunman opened fire in Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Connecticut.
- In July 2012, an armed gunman opened fire at a Century movie theater in Aurora, Colorado, killing 12 people and injuring 70 others.

## What Should People Do In Case Of An Active Shooter Attack?



**"Run"** to the nearest exits, making use of available concealment while moving away from the source of hazard.



If unable to safely evacuate, **"hide"** in a secure area where access can be blocked or entryways can be locked, and, as appropriate, **"fight"**.



If no rapid escape is possible, seek cover behind any available natural or artificial objects that eliminate direct line of sight from the source of hazard.



Call 9-1-1 and remain alert for potential secondary attacks.



Render first aid when safe to do so.



Maintain situational awareness while providing assistance to others.



When help arrives, follow instructions given by law enforcement and first responders.

## Protective Measures



### Physical Security

- Post signage relating to emergency entry and exit points, first-aid stations, and shelter locations.
- Define the perimeter and areas that require access control, and identify especially sensitive or critical areas that require special access controls.
  - Establish surveillance plan to complement perimeter controls.



### Access, Planning, and Personnel

- Conduct periodic background checks on all staff assigned to critical or sensitive areas.
- Review personnel files of recently terminated employees to determine whether they pose a security risk and ensure they are removed from systems.
- Devise credential systems that indicate areas of access and purpose of activity on the premises.
  - Issue special identification badges to contractors, cleaning crews, vendors, and temporary employees.
  - Require that badges be displayed at all times and verified to gain access to the building.
  - Collect all badges when visits are complete.

## Additional Resources

- Hometown Security Initiative: <https://www.dhs.gov/hometown-security>
- Active Shooter Preparedness Program: <https://www.dhs.gov/active-shooter-preparedness>
- "If You See Something, Say Something®": <https://www.dhs.gov/see-something-say-something>
- Nationwide Suspicious Activity Reporting Initiative: <https://nsi.ncirc.gov/>

Protective Security Advisors (PSAs) proactively engage with government partners and the private sector to protect critical infrastructure. For more information or to contact your local PSA, e-mail [NICC@hq.dhs.gov](mailto:NICC@hq.dhs.gov).