

**ARE  
YOU  
READY?**

**Emergency  
Preparedness  
Roundtable**

## Emergency Preparedness Roundtable

As we offer trainings, we are often asked questions that resonate beyond that particular school, college, or workplace. We invite our team of subject matter experts to address these questions and provide guidance for others facing these issues. They each offer a unique perspective with practical advice for addressing these challenges.

This Emergency Preparedness Roundtable includes questions from a large K-12 district in Northern California related to all-hazard emergency response, crisis de-escalation, Mindset active assailant response, and situational awareness.

These documents are updated regularly as new questions arise. If you have a question you'd like us to consider including the next update, please email [bethany@dprep.com](mailto:bethany@dprep.com).



**Amy Murphy, PhD**, serves as an associate professor of student development and higher education leadership at Angelo State University. She is also the program coordinator for the M.Ed. in student development and leadership in higher education and the graduate certificate in academic advising, both fully online programs. Amy has over 20 years of experience in higher education and student affairs. She is formerly the dean of students and managing director of the Center for Campus Life at Texas Tech University. Her experiences include being the chair of the school's behavioral intervention team, overseeing prevention and response activities for gender-based violence and discrimination as the deputy Title IX coordinator for students, and having administrative involvement in student conduct, disability services, counseling, and enrollment management.



**Lisa Pescara-Kovach, PhD**, is a professor of educational psychology at The University of Toledo, where she also serves as the Director of the Center for Education in Mass Violence and Suicide and Chair of the Mass Violence Collaborative. Lisa's international and national level peer-reviewed and invited presentations include, but are not limited to, the topics of suicides and homicides related to bullying victimization, behavioral threat assessment, and school, campus, and workplace shootings. Lisa co-authored *White Supremacist Violence: Understanding the Resurgence and Stopping the Spread*. Her most recent publications address media contagion in connection to suicides and targeted shootings, as well as the mental health and mass shooting myth.



**Brian Van Brunt, EdD**, is the Director of Behavior and Threat Management for D-Prep Safety and the President of the Workplace Violence Prevention Association. Author of over a dozen books, Brian has spent time as a child and family therapist, university professor, assistant deputy director of training at Secure Community Network, partner at TNG, and president of the National Association for Behavioral Intervention and Threat Assessment (NABITA). He is an internationally recognized expert in behavioral intervention, threat assessment, crisis preparedness, mental illness, and instructional design. Brian has provided consulting services to schools, colleges, and universities across the country and abroad on a wide variety of topics related to student mental health, counseling, campus violence, and behavioral intervention.





**Chris Usher** serves as the Director of Audits and Investigations for Westgate Resorts and has over twenty years of experience in law enforcement, government, nonprofit, and security management in private security sectors. Chris' work and responsibilities with the Jewish Federation of Greater Washington, in coordination with Secure Community Network, several large corporations, the Department of Labor, and US Job Corps, included facilitating security concerns through consultation, education, training, and physical security assessments; maintaining and creating effective partnerships with local, state, and federal law enforcement and emergency management agencies; implementing a nation-wide emergency communications system; monitoring intelligence related to terrorism and public safety; and assisting with the coordination of security for major events.



**Brian Heider** serves as the Executive Director of the Workplace Violence Prevention Association and the President of Axiom Investigations Group, a professional investigation and risk management firm dedicated to serving the business, education, and public safety communities. For more than 23 years, Brian has dedicated his professional life to individual and public safety. Brian started a career in law enforcement in 2000, working as a police officer and then detective for the City of Orange Police Department in Southern California. Specialized assignments Brian worked on include sexual assault and child abuse investigations, crime scene investigations, school resource officer, homicide investigator, gang investigator, and narcotics investigator. He was the department's go-to author of high-profile search warrants and is a court-certified expert in multiple criminal and civil subject matter areas. Brian was also named the California Narcotic Officers Association (CNOA) "Officer of the Year." In August 2023, Brian launched Axiom Investigations Group to provide expert professional investigative services to clients throughout California.



**Charlie Taylor** is the Director of Behavior and Threat Management for D-Prep Safety and the President of the Workplace Violence Prevention Association. Author of over a dozen books, Brian has spent time as a child and family therapist, university professor, assistant deputy director of training at Secure Community Network, partner at TNG, and president of the National Association for Behavioral Intervention and Threat Assessment (NABITA). He is an internationally recognized expert in behavioral intervention, threat assessment, crisis preparedness, mental illness, and instructional design. Brian has provided consulting services to schools, colleges, and universities across the country and abroad on a wide variety of topics related to student mental health, counseling, campus violence, and behavioral intervention.



**Chris Taylor, PhD**, is the President of the International Alliance for Care and Threat Teams (InterACTT) and a consultant with DPrep Safety. He formerly served as the Dean of Students and Chief Student Affairs Officer at Wright State University. Chris has over 30 years of experience in higher education, including residence life, Title IX investigation and adjudication, student conduct, threat assessment, and chairing behavioral intervention teams. His research interests include masculinity and gender and he is the author of a variety of publications.



**Stuart Frisch** has an extensive background as a security professional, with more than 20 years of experience planning, developing, and implementing diversified security programs across the military, corporate, and government sectors. He is a certified trainer through the U.S. Department of Justice and the U.S. Department of Homeland Security. Stuart served with the Memphis Police Department, Office of Homeland Security, for more than a decade and previously served in a Special Operations capacity with the Israel Defense Forces.

## ALL-HAZARD EMERGENCY RESPONSE

**1** When escaping a car in a flooding situation, are there some sample tools you would suggest for us to invest in? Unfortunately, window breakers can also be used to break into cars illegally.



**Brian VB:** There are a few different options. Simple window breakers often have an attached seatbelt cutter. Slightly more complicated versions are more expensive and may have the potential for mechanical breakdown. Unless you are going to regularly test and maintain a spring-loaded version, it would be advised to keep it simple and spend that extra money on multiple devices for each car. In terms of using these for crime, it is a concern, so it's a good idea to keep them in the vehicle. Key chain versions will be difficult to use when the body is under stress and will likely increase the risk of inappropriate use.



**Chris U:** The response is different for a flooding situation or a car that has gone into a river or lake. With rising water, your best choice is to avoid driving through puddles or running water if possible. If the water is above the muffler, the engine will stall and you will not be able to move the car. If you find yourself crossing water, keep driving forward, do not back up. Be cautious, as moving water can cause the car to float, and then you have no control. If your car stalls and you decide to exit the car, remember that the water can be very powerful. Move to higher ground or the area you came from (a known area is generally safer than an unknown one).

If you find yourself in a car in a river or lake, be aware that you will be disoriented or possibly injured. Roll down the windows if you can. If you don't have a window-breaking tool, the metal prongs that hold the headrests can be used. You will not be able to break windshields, which are made of highly tempered glass. It is best to break the back window if possible, as this is the biggest window that will allow you to escape. Aim for the corners as that's the easiest spot to break. The vehicle will lean towards the hood because of the weight of the engine, so breaking the back window also gives you extra time to get out. You will not be able to escape while the water is entering the vehicle, You will need to wait until the car is almost filled to escape without resistance. Remember, you have may have sunk deeper than you think. The water may be dark. Follow air bubbles; air bubbles always go up.

**2** Will the police know what H.O.T. and R.A.I.N. mean when we call a suspicious package in? Is that what we should use when we talk to them?



**Brian H:** Not always. I would recommend being as specific as possible with the dispatcher and speaking in plain English. Let them know why the item is suspicious and concerning. Provide as many descriptive details as possible to the dispatcher when you call in the suspicious item.



**Chris U:** Unless they have been trained in bomb and suspicious package awareness, I wouldn't count on this. These acronyms are great for training but they do not necessarily transfer across the board.

**3** What should we teach our students about responding to an earthquake? Is hiding in a doorway still advised?



**Brian H:** Standing in a doorway is no longer recommended. The idea of hiding in a doorway originated from older buildings with weaker construction but is not recommended for modern structures. This approach rarely offers added protection, as modern buildings don't have reinforced door frames. Most doorways are no stronger than any other wall and don't protect from falling objects. Another concern a door could slam shut during shaking, causing injury. FEMA [explains this further](#) and provides [safety activities](#) for students and teachers.



**Lisa:** The American Red Cross recommends "[Drop, Cover, and Hold On.](#)" Drop to your knees to allow quick movement to safety while protecting your major organs. Cover your head and neck. If you must, use your arms to do so, but ideally, get under a desk or table to protect yourself from falling debris. And, finally, hold on until the earthquake is over.



**Chris U:** Do not go outside, especially in between buildings, where you are at risk from falling debris and glass from broken windows. When an earthquake hits, it may take a minute to register what is going on. If you are driving, the roads can look like they are moving. Stairwells are the strongest structures in a commercial building. They are block walls and are meant to withstand earthquakes. They also have less glass and debris that could fall and injure you. Any interior room, such as a bathroom or large closet, also works well. If you are in a bathroom, you can get into the tub and use a mattress and blankets to cover yourself to protect from falling debris.

**4** Are fire blankets effective? Should they be included in our emergency kit? They might be easier for kids to use than extinguishers.



**Brian VB:** [Fire blankets](#) are designed to be thrown over a fire to help extinguish it. As with any emergency device, checking it regularly and knowing how to use it is essential. The only challenge to a fire blanket would be if the user focused on this instead of a fire extinguisher or pulling a fire alarm. As mentioned, when the body and mind are under extreme stress, the more things to remember, the more likely things will be forgotten or used incorrectly.



**Chris U:** These are not a bad idea, but an old-school wool blanket works just as well. A fire extinguisher is more practical and covers a larger area. Fire blankets are used for smaller isolated fires or people on fire. Regardless of what you have, training and practice are required.



**Chris T:** Some folks, including K-12 children and some adults, are intimidated by extinguishers, and pauses in usage could be dangerous. Be sure to regularly review how and when to use a blanket. Keep in mind that fire blankets should be seen as supplemental and should not replace extinguishers, as they have a smaller range and will not be as effective in all types of fires.

**5** What do we do if there is a fire and we can't escape through either door?



**Brian H:** If there is a window in the classroom, that might become the only available exit point if the fire is right outside the door and escape cannot safely be made through the door. Make sure you can open the window or, if the window cannot be opened, have an available tool to break the window in an emergency and a way to safely clear the broken glass to prevent cuts or more serious injuries. If the classroom is located on the second story, you should have an emergency escape ladder in the classroom. Make sure the ladder is long enough to safely reach the ground and provides enough space for footing and hand placement.



**Chris U:** You may have to break a window to get out. If you don't have specific tools for this purpose, you will have to use something from the room, like a chair. Use the blinds or curtains (or jackets and hoodies) to block shards of glass and clear the frame.

**6** How should we respond to a wildfire as opposed to fires that occur in the school?



**Chris U:** The first step is understanding the different types of fires. The [National Emergency Response Information System](#) (NERIS) separates indoor fires into the following categories:

- Structure fire: Building fires that are not contained.
- Vehicle fire: Passenger vehicle fire
- Cooking fire: Fires are contained within the cooking container/vessel.
- Chimney or flue fire: Fires that are contained within the chimney.
- Fire in a mobile home: When used as a fixed residence.
- Smoke scare: The odor of smoke.

It is also important to understand that all fires do not occur in a home or school building. The following describes how outdoor fires and smoke are classified.

- Wildland fire: Forest, woods, or wildland fire.
- Brush fire: Brush or brush-and-grass mixture fire.
- Grass fire: Fire in grass ground cover, with little or no involvement of vegetation.
- Unauthorized burning: Unauthorized fires that are under control (does not include campfires).



**Charlie:** The school should maintain a “fire-safe perimeter,” clearing an area of about 30 feet from all sides of the buildings of all leaves, downed branches, and anything else flammable. When wildfires are in the area, stay informed about the direction and intensity of the fire. Listen for evacuation instructions. Wildfire evacuations will take more time than simply evacuating the school from a building fire, so tracking the path of fires is crucial. This [School Fire Safety Checklist](#) reviews some essential requirements and life safety systems for your school. The Readiness and Emergency Management for Schools Technical Assistance Center offers further guidance for schools in this [Wildfire Fact Sheet](#).

**7** When calling 911, our district often gets the response, “Please hold for the next available dispatcher...” What should we do in these scenarios?



**Lisa:** It is important to hold if told to do so. This situation shouldn’t occur regularly and, in fact, is rare. However, it isn’t uncommon to be placed on hold if the dispatcher determines it to be of a non-emergent nature, so be clear and concise about what is happening. Remain on the line until you get the information you need, and only hang up once the 911 dispatcher instructs you to do so.



**Brian H:** Before the hold is completed, and if it is indeed an emergency, I recommend saying something like, “This is an emergency! I cannot hold.”



**Chris U:** Keep calling, and have someone else call, especially during a major event. Do not wait for their directions; get yourself to safety.

**8** Are there specific warning signs we should look for when a crowd may be on the verge of becoming unmanageable?



**Brian H:** [CNN](#) explains some of the warning signs and offers a useful interactive graphic explaining crowd density and how many people are in a single place. The article outlines the importance of the leadership and performers keeping aware of crowds that grow too dense to ask the crowd to stop and take a step back.



**Brian VB:** It is important to keep situationally aware when in or around a crowd. This means keeping your eyes open, remaining upright, keeping your arms in front of your chest to allow for breathing room, avoiding panic to save your breath, and moving away from barriers that you could become crushed against. State Farm provides some important and practical advice.



**Chris U:** One thing to consider is mob or herd mentality, a psychological phenomenon that describes when people adopt the behaviors and attitudes of a group, often at the expense of their own judgment. It can occur in many different settings, including schools, the workplace, and even political affiliations. Unfortunately, crowds can change very quickly. There will be signs, but unless you are observing from a distance, you may not see them. The biggest advice is to maintain situational awareness, try to stay on the outskirts of large crowds and do not stand near structures that you could become crushed against.

**9** What advice can you give for evacuating those with mobility challenges or students who have visual or hearing impairments?



**Brian H:** The Los Angeles Unified School District put out a helpful [checklist/guide](#) on this topic. They stress the importance of having a plan before the evacuation, understanding the different resources needed depending on the nature of the mobility challenges, and identifying staff who will be assisting during an emergency. They offer specific advice on how to help those with vision, hearing, and cognitive processing challenges during an emergency.



**Chris U:** Staff need to be trained on these procedures, even more than with standard drills. There are products that may be helpful, including high-visibility vests, high-frequency beacons, and mobility assistance tools. These tools should be tested regularly.

**10** In a longer lockdown or shelter-in-place, what is the provision for people to go to the bathroom? Is there a classroom portable toilet?



**Lisa:** Many teachers and college professors/instructors have created “go buckets” that they fill with tourniquets, water, toilet paper, antiseptic spray, isopropyl alcohol, and other items that may become necessary in the event of shelter-in-place. Though these situations are often resolved in a timely manner with the assistance of law enforcement, there is a chance they can span hours, especially if the building is being cleared. The bucket itself can be used as a makeshift toilet.



**Chris U:** While inexpensive [camp toilets](#) are available, they are not usually found in classrooms or businesses. Most school lockdowns do not last longer than a few hours. If a makeshift toilet needs to be made, you can make one out of the trash can in the classroom.

**11** Do you have some advice or product suggestions to filter water in an emergency?



**Lisa:** [Aquatabs](#) can easily be dropped into water and function as purifiers. Another option is the [Lifestraw](#), which is used regularly by hikers and others who spend time outdoors without potable water.



**Chris U:** While it is not a bad idea to have a way to filter water, most emergencies don’t last for weeks unless it is a large natural disaster. Having a couple of cases of water available will usually suffice. When preparing for a natural disaster, fill large containers with water and freeze bottles of water.



**Charlie:** A good rule of thumb is to plan for a gallon of water per day per person. At home, you can prepare a [water bladder](#) in the bathtub. At school, the [Lifestraw gravity system](#) filters larger volumes of water for groups.



## CRISIS DE-ESCALATION

**1** How should an instructor handle elementary school-aged children who curse and use derogatory language to each other?



**Brian VB:** Start with an understanding of the developmental stages of students and any outside factors, such as disability, trauma history, and social and emotional challenges. Ensuring adequate staff levels, the application and resourcing of students' Individualized Educational Plan (IEP), and the correct use of classroom aids are all critical to addressing this behavior. Teachers need to set clear expectations early and often, explaining why certain language is not appropriate. While not always easy, the behavior needs to be addressed each time it occurs. Don't let smaller incidents slide. Avoid shaming the students and instead, focus on expectations that keep the classroom safe for all students.



**Amy:** Talking with the students from the first day about the expectations and values important to the class provides the foundation for addressing any behavior that occurs. Keep the classroom rules simple and connect them to broader values, such as respect for each other. Communicating these same ideas to parents with regular conduct updates is important too. The other element to consider here is the context around where and why this is occurring. Is this cursing during recess or lunch? Is it being said out of frustration when students are being teased or arguing? Is the language being used during class discussions? Is it language that seems to be a part of how they regularly talk to each other? When we think about the context around what is occurring related to student misbehavior, it helps us to identify root causes and better interventions to prevent the behavior in the future.

**2** Some students with severe behavioral issues and on Individualized Educational Plans (IEPs) make verbal threats to escape educational demands. How we should respond to these threats without discouraging them from sharing information that might help us better assess a plan we may be building with them?



**Amy:** This is an example of why a multidisciplinary behavioral intervention team is the recommended approach, rather than trying to handle things on your own or in a siloed way that only considers one response to the situation. A behavioral intervention team can consider the full context around the concern, assess the level of risk and the nature of the threat, and then determine a broad approach to interventions. In a situation like this, it's likely to include progressive discipline, an IEP review, academic support, parent involvement, and coordination with you as the student's primary teacher.



**Brian VB:** First off, it's essential that we respond to every threat that is made. Ignoring or explaining away a threat or handling it exclusively from a law enforcement or student discipline lens is problematic. Once we agree to review each threat, then we can discuss the difference between a triage assessment and a full violence risk assessment. There are times when a student says something that falls squarely into an affective violence and/or transient threat. This occurs more frequently with those who have a history of emotional and behavioral problems in the classroom. In these cases, a triage assessment of the threat will help determine whether or not a full violence risk assessment is needed.

**3** Many students bring significant trauma and emotional baggage into the classroom. How can teachers work best with these students? How can we handle very young students who are running about and not listening?



**Lisa:** It sounds as though the students have experienced trauma. If that is the case, the impact can cause changes in thinking patterns, emotional expression, and academic success, in addition to physical hyperarousal. What you seem to be describing is hyperarousal. Students who have undergone trauma (e.g., physical, verbal, or emotional abuse; neglect; community violence) are in a constant state of fight or flight, aka hyperarousal. It is likely they have rapid heart rates, can't settle down, and can't focus. It is incredibly important to maintain a sense of calm. Reacting with an aroused state will only make matters worse, as the student might become defensive and increasingly aggressive. Social-emotional competence is the best way to address this, as it helps students become self-aware to the extent they can regulate their own emotions and work toward healthy reactions. I highly recommend looking into resources offered through the [United States Department of Education](#).



**Amy:** It can be helpful to think about student behavioral concerns like puzzles with many different pieces, including students' backgrounds, experiences, strengths, and skills. Each situation requires that you consider carefully each piece of the puzzle to better understand the big picture. This means we have to spend time thinking about when these behaviors occur, any common triggering activities, and when the behavior does not occur. A team approach involving multiple perspectives, including mental health, academic support, disability, and conduct, helps you address this holistically.

**MINDSET ACTIVE ASSAILANT TRAINING**

**1** While it's an extreme example, what should we do if a student had a gun in the classroom and was making threats? What should we do if the shooter is already in the classroom?



**Brian VB:** Run, hide, and fight are three approaches to be used in various active assailant scenarios. Run, hide, fight is not a linear progression. These are choices that are made depending on the specific situation. In this example, hiding is off the table, as the student has taken out a weapon. Running is also a difficult option, as attempting to outrun a bullet or make a sprint for the exits will likely result in being shot. Fighting, which involves distracting and/or attempting to control the weapon, would likely be the best option in this scenario. If a different scenario allows for hiding as a viable option, it's important to recall hiding is an active concept. While someone is hiding, they are also actively looking to determine 1) if they should instead run, 2) if there is a better hiding place, and 3) if they have to fight, what weapons could be used and how can a group work together to strike different areas on the attacker (e.g., one going low, one going high, one controlling the hands/weapon). The [FBI's training video](#) on run, hide, fight offers a great example of this.



**Stuart:** If you are looking at an extremely close-quarters scenario like this, run and hide are not viable options. One option is to commit to an offensive strategy that removes the student's ability to use all their senses. Use improvised weapons, such as coffee, tea, smoke from fire extinguishers, etc., to limit their ability to see. What they can't see, they can't attack. Also, responses that will limit motion from the threat should be considered. Attack their legs, knees, hips, and feet. Lack of movement gives you more time. More time means more options for survival.



**Chris U:** Remember that all examples are situationally dependent. It's hard to say what someone would do as you would have to consider how many kids are in the classroom, if there is a clear evacuation route, if they have made passive threats, and what the age of the student is.

**2** In an active shooter/threat scenario, what should our response be when we are working with 3- and 4-year-olds with disabilities? Even young children without disabilities have trouble staying quiet in the best of circumstances and would have trouble understanding a "lockdown/barricade" command.



**Chris U:** For younger students, we used quiet drills. They will not understand lockdown, so call it quiet a drill. Make a game out of it. Who can be the quietest? Give them distraction devices like (muted) iPads, fidget spinners, etc. With young students and students with disabilities, these drills need to be done more frequently, especially if you know how they will react.



**Stuart:** At pre-middle school level, children should not be depended on to assist with these protocols. The run, hid, fight protocols should be executed by staff. At these young ages, noise discipline and cognitive retention is not a factor in an emergency response.

**3** What if the police response is likely to be longer than the national average of 3-5 minutes, either because of a remote location or a busy and understaffed police department?



**Brian H:** It starts with the 911 call. The dispatcher needs to triage calls and respond to the most critical first. As soon as they answer and say, “911, what is your emergency?,” quickly state that there is a life-threatening situation unfolding, you need the police now, and that you cannot hold. You need to be direct and concise with the dispatcher who answers the phone so they understand you are under an extreme emergency.

In a situation where police response is likely to be slower, you need to make sure you train more frequently in active assailant response and become adept at bridging that response time gap from the initial call to 911 to police arrival.



**Chris U:** As soon as they pick up, say that you have an active shooter at your location. I can almost guarantee they will not put you on hold. Usually, they ask if you or anyone else is injured or life is endangered before dispatch puts you on hold. Many jurisdictions have text availability as well, if you cannot reach the dispatcher by phone.



**Stuart:** In this case, you must create an active threat response plan at the individual and organizational levels that will allow the appropriate responses until law enforcement arrives.



**Chris T:** If your district has not had a conversation with the local police it may be a good idea to do that at the district level to best understand expectations of response including timing and other details. Based on that information it will be easier to plan. With that in mind, following the normal run, hide, fight process until law enforcement arrives makes sense.

**4** If we don’t have a fast police response or live in a more rural area, how much time does it take for other police in surrounding towns (or SWAT) to respond?



**Chris U:** The best answer is to ask your local police department what their response time is. Rural areas will take much longer, which means you will need to train based on this. Be advised that most small towns will not have SWAT teams. They may have a few officers who are SWAT trained but won’t have full-time SWAT.



**Amy:** School districts should identify available law enforcement resources and have formalized agreements outlining roles and what can be expected when support is needed. These may also exist with other public and private entities providing resources during emergencies, such as health services, mental health support, and sites for reunification. Hosting an opportunity for teachers to meet key representatives of these agencies and ask questions like this one outside of formal training exercises can help with information sharing and emergency planning.



**5** Should we consider the trade off between making noise to build a barricade and alerting the shooter to where we are? Should we be quiet or be getting ready to fight?



**Chris U:** This is an excellent question. First and foremost, lock your door. Really, it depends on where the assailant is located (you may not know). But the benefits of barricading your doors outweigh the benefits of being quiet. When the shooting starts, there is going to be chaos.

The shooter will have auditory exclusion and will not necessarily hear or register the noise of barricading your door. It is extremely important to start that process of barricading immediately if you cannot safely exit. Once the lockdown starts, you have time to barricade the door unless the shooter is in your area, in which case you should run. When there is a lull in the chaos, perhaps during reloading, that's when it is important to be quiet. Once again, drill, drill, drill.



**Stuart:** You need to do both. The barricade will not hide the fact of your presence; it will force the threat actor to take the few seconds/minutes they have to complete their plan in working to physically access you. Prepare the barricade and prepare to fight if escape is not a viable option.

**6** Do we respond differently to a “drive-by” scenario or threats that are coming from outside the school?



**Chris U:** This is a lockout scenario. The threat is outside, and you don't want to let them in. Lock the doors and shelter in place. Close shades, blinds, etc. You do not want to run in these scenarios because you could run into danger.



**Stuart:** This is the difference between “lockout” and executing a run, hide, fight response. For the system you described, locking the exterior doors would be effective in preventing incursion by a threat actor and allowing staff and students to avoid a run, hide, fight response when there is no active threat.

**7** If the children are outside at recess, is it best to run, find cover/shelter, or go inside a classroom?



**Chris U:** Run. You do not want to run back into a school where the assailant could be. This should be discussed in your plan. Your plan should include predetermined relocation and rally points.



**Stuart:** If available, the first option should always be to run/escape/avoid the danger area. If this is not an option, move quickly and directly to a pre-designated safe room. This should be included in your response plan.

**8** What if a classroom has only one door and all windows? What is the safest wall? Do we barricade the windows?



**Chris U:** Generally, the safer corner is the one furthest away from the door, generally on the door side. When someone enters, they will be focused on what's right in front of them (the fatal funnel). Being in the safe corner allows you time to react and possibly fight if necessary. Don't spend too much time barricading windows. I do not know of an active assailant using windows as entry points. However, if possible, close the curtains or shades, particularly any windows in the door that allow a line of sight into the room from the hallway.



**Charlie:** Depending on the situation, it may be better to run than barricade. Those windows may be a good escape route. If not, I would recommend marking the safer corner in the room ahead of time so that students know where to go under stress. Make sure that the windows in doorways have some sort of blinds that will eliminate an aggressor's ability to see into the room.

**9** With younger students in the classroom, is it better to hide or to try to create a barricade without assistance? If the classroom has a bathroom, should we move all the students into there even though there's no escape route?



**Chris U:** It is difficult to get young students to run unless they are already outside during recess. This is where hiding/barricading is better, depending on where you are located. If you can lock and barricade the primary door, then yes, use the bathroom as your safe room. Barricade the bathroom if possible. This is why training and having a plan for each school, area, and age group is extremely important.



**Stuart:** Escape should always be the first and best option if it is available. If not, try to barricade first, then secure yourself and the children in the safest space available.

**10** How should we barricade if we have a classroom with four doors?



**Chris U:** This requires pre-planning and depends on where the doors lead. If one goes outside, exit and run. If they all need to be barricaded, have students be responsible for the door closest to them. Practice and see what works, then have regular drills.



**Brian VB:** This involves good situational awareness. If you are in an active assailant situation and in a room with many windows or multiple doors, running through the door that takes you farthest from the attacker. If you cannot create a reasonable and secure lockdown/barricade that allows for a significant structural time delay, consider an alternative location to lockdown/barricade in.

## 11 What can the students do with the teacher to help overwhelm the shooter?



**Chris U:** This depends on the age of students, but generally, look for things that can be used as weapons, including fire extinguishers, chairs, books, belts, etc. The goal is to overwhelm the assailant, dislodge the weapon, and stop the threat.



**Stuart:** Have them throw things, turn out the lights, and give them hot water or coffee to throw. Have them attack the threat's lower extremities to prevent forward motion.



**Charlie:** Have a plan and practice that plan. Work out ahead of time who has what job. If it comes time to fight, a group of students and overwhelm the attacker. Make sure any weapon of opportunity is used and that the students know it is okay to fight dirty.

## 12 Are deadbolts at the bottom of classroom doors effective?



**Chris U:** They are, but most fire codes will not allow them. You will need [devices specifically made for this](#). If at all possible, having locks at the top and bottom of the door is most effective. However, inexpensive and easy-to-use doorstops work as well. Just be careful that these are not used to prop open doors when things are calm, allowing entrance into the building to the classroom at any time.



**Stuart:** The top inside is better, particularly in elementary and middle schools, as only the teacher is likely to be tall enough to operate them.



**Brian VB:** You need to consider the fire codes and what the school rules say about this and what a teacher and classroom, afraid for their lives, can do in an emergency. A video made by [Fighting Chance Solutions](#) offers some advice concerning how teachers may be able to take some additional steps related to classroom door locks.

### 13 Is it worth practicing self-defense moves or fight options beforehand?



**Chris U:** Yes, it is a good idea to train in self-defense for many reasons. Just know it takes years to be proficient. Even as highly trained as I am, I would only use fighting as a last option. It's best to get out and not be a target. But there are lots of benefits to training, both in case you do need to fight and to give you more confidence in general.



**Stuart:** Always. In an emergency, you will not "rise to the occasion." You will only fall back on your level of training.



**Charlie:** Preparing yourself and your students is always a good idea. Your body won't go where your mind has never been, meaning that even just visualizing a situation and walking through it, really considering all the small steps to be taken, will drastically decrease your response time and increase your chances of survival.

### 14 During a lockdown, should we respond to a fire alarm? What if the attacker pulled the alarm to get people out of the classrooms?



**Chris U:** I believe there have been a few cases when this has happened. First and foremost, your safety from the assailant is the priority. Unless you smell fire or the fire is in your classroom, it is probably safer to be cautious and wait for further instruction.



**Brian VB:** This is another time when situational awareness can help determine the best and safest course of action. Just like rooms with many windows and doorways, there are times when the "rule" of staying in the place you are and engaging in a lockdown/barricade procedure can be overridden by specific challenges. If a fire alarm goes off, the challenge is sorting the risk between a possible fire outside of the room you are in and the location of an active assailant. This requires weighing factors such as what floor in the building you are on and how quickly an exit could be made if a fire began to spread or smoke began to enter the classroom.



## SITUATIONAL AWARENESS

**1** You talked about situational awareness in terms of paying attention rather than profiling. Can you explain the differences between the two?



**Brian VB:** With good situational awareness, we consider everything that is going on around us to be more prepared for action. Situational awareness is also well described as practicing prediction – paying attention to anything out of the ordinary and preparing to respond or react when needed. When profiling, we base those responses or reactions on assumptions and often jump to a conclusion in a way that causes harm.

Let me give an example. I grew up in Wanamassa, NJ, and worked as a lifeguard at the Ocean Township Pool and Tennis Club in the summer. During the early part of the summer season, local inner-city day camp programs came to the pool to swim. Many of the campers were students of color. One shift, I was watching over the 16-foot-deep diving pool. A young Black boy, about nine years old, was coaxed by his friends to climb to the high diving board and jump.

When I saw him climb up, I set my towel aside and prepared myself in case he needed help. I had watched enough of these campers over the years to know that many of them had not been exposed to swimming and were not strong swimmers. I also saw that he had been pressured to dive, which implied that he was not confident about it. My situational awareness allowed me to respond more quickly.

This wasn't profiling, assuming he couldn't swim based on the racial stereotype. While my reaction may have been the same – preparing to jump in if needed – I may instead have stopped him from trying. Profiling can make us overreact to some people and under-react to others. If the camper had been white, I would have responded in the same way. A profiler might not have paid as close attention to him, assuming he would be fine.

Situational awareness means paying attention to the totality of our surroundings and preparing based on what we see, not what we assume about people.



**Chris U:** This is where overlapping occurs. If there is a report of a robbery and you assume it's a person of color, this is discriminatory and bias-based profiling. However, if there is a description of the suspect that includes their race, this is no longer profiling because you have specific information. Situational awareness allows you to be familiar with your surroundings and to know what is supposed to be in that area.

**2** What would your advice be for Black students or other students of color who have been profiled or identified as problems by police (e.g., “walking while Black, driving while Black, shopping while Black”)?



**Amy:** A multifaceted approach seems called for here, with a focus on the specific school environment and the law enforcement officers who work most closely with the school. I’d start with listening sessions with the students to understand their specific experiences, know their concerns, hear ideas for responding, and learn what they need to feel more supported. Report their concerns to a chief diversity officer for the school district to allow an enhanced response that considers the overall school climate related to these issues. If it’s possible, having a school resource officer or law enforcement representative come into the classroom to talk informally with the students could help build understanding and relationships between students and law enforcement in the school community.

**3** Aside from an active assailant event, where else would situational awareness be helpful, like running or jogging, in crowded locations, online, and related to non-violent crime prevention?



**Lisa:** Situational awareness should be used in all activities outside of the home. The best advice is to keep your head on a swivel, so to speak, looking to your sides and ahead at all times. In addition to active assailant situations, situational awareness is helpful to avoid theft of personal belongings. For instance, predators sometimes target people who are leaning into their vehicle, putting away groceries or other purchases. We’ve seen attacks, theft, and kidnappings at retail stores. Always know what is around you.



**Chris U:** These situations are arguably more important because they happen every day. While it seems active assailant events happen all the time, the probability is actually very low. You are more likely to be robbed or assaulted than be in a mass attack. Your local police department’s website will have reports of the most common crimes in the area. Sometimes they have heat maps to show the problem areas. Regardless, the tactics are the same. Good situational awareness works for every aspect of your life. My biggest advice is to get off of your phone. Look around, be a hard target, and don’t trip over a curb.

**4** What would your advice be for Black students or other students of color who have been profiled or identified as problems by police (e.g., “walking while Black, driving while Black, shopping while Black”)?



**Chris U:** Try to stay aware of what is happening in your neighborhood, city, state, etc. Being situationally aware allows you to avoid areas with conflicts, if possible. I am not sure if there are any additional steps, but just being aware. This is true beyond the political situation. For example, during hurricane season, being aware of the hurricane’s path allows you to prepare better, maybe evacuate, get supplies, etc. Situational awareness does not mean we need to live in fear. Situational awareness empowers us to make better-informed decisions.



**Amy:** Situational awareness also includes reporting concerns that you notice to the appropriate parties. If you are aware of individuals or groups showing indications that frustrations and anger around election results are moving toward action, you want to make sure and share those concerns with a behavioral intervention team or law enforcement. Research on extremist violence indicates that violence is connected less to a specific ideology and more to lingering grievances contributing to an already unstable social and personal environment for an individual and building toward blaming others, hardening of perspectives, and a distorted justification for violent action.



**Chris T:** This is a concern. We hosted a series recently on college students working through issues related to the election and other causes for unrest, and some of the same lessons apply. I think it’s important to be ready to listen and de-escalate political tensions among students or student groups. That said, I also think some preparation ahead of time is warranted. I work with one K-12 school that has handled the issue by having a cultural norm of being able to talk about candidates a student or their family might support but only saying things that support the candidate they’re talking about, no bashing other candidates. I also would caution schools against ignoring the issue or using a zero-tolerance policy on political discussion. Instead, modeling how to have civil discussions and allowing for opportunities to practice those skills makes sense. Lean on your everyday school norms as well (raise your hand, listen, wait your turn, etc.).