



ACTIVE SHOOTER DRILLS

Guide & Resource

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KENTUCKY DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION



Vision

Ensure each and every student is empowered and equipped to pursue a successful future.

Mission

To partner with districts, schools, families, students, business and industry, and communities to provide leadership and support to ensure success for each and every student.

About

The Kentucky Department of Education is a service agency of the Commonwealth of Kentucky, and part of the Education and Workforce Development Cabinet. The department provides resources and guidance to Kentucky's public schools and districts as they implement the state's P-12 education requirements. The department also serves as the state liaison for federal education requirements and funding opportunities.

OBJECTIVE AND KEY CONCEPTS

Objective: Prepare staff to respond to protect students and themselves in the event of an armed intruder or active shooter emergency; maintain preparedness in a trauma-informed way to minimize potential for raising anxiety or re-traumatizing staff.

Safety preparedness is an essential part of the school emergency plan so that students and staff are able to act to maximize safety in the event of a school emergency. Safety planning should include a continuum of activities for students and staff, and combine classroom learning and practice drills. All learning and drills should be tailored to meet the unique needs of schools and their students and staff, although they share core elements. All safety preparedness also should be designed to minimize the potential for causing or creating a traumatic experience for students and staff participating in the safety exercises. Active shooter training is one element of school safety planning focusing on staff preparedness.

WHAT IS A TRAUMA-INFORMED ACTIVE SHOOTER TRAINING?

Trauma-informed active shooter training ensures that staff is prepared to respond in the event of an active shooter situation on the school campus, without experiencing trauma from the training itself. An active shooter is defined as “an individual actively engaged in killing or attempting to kill people in a confined and other populated area. In most cases, active shooters use firearms and there is no pattern or method to their selection of victims. Active shooter situations are unpredictable and evolve quickly” (FEMA Emergency Management Institute, 2019: <https://training.fema.gov/is/courseoverview.aspx?code=IS-907>). Active shooter training is designed to prepare staff to rapidly assess the emergency situation, consider potential responses, choose the safest response for their students and themselves, and act quickly to execute the response. Active shooter training prepares staff to manage

expected anxiety and fear and be able to respond in the face of extreme threat.

Active shooter training should include three phases of training: preparation, practice, and processing the experience.

- 1. Preparation** through classroom instruction should include an overview of training activities and expectations; introduction of hypothetical situations that will be practiced; education about what to do and why; tabletop exercises; and preparation for the emotional responses the practice may elicit. Classroom instruction should always provide participants with the opportunity to review the response options, ask questions, and address anxieties. Classroom instruction should be conducted in a group

setting, as individual instruction may increase anxiety or risk misunderstanding of important concepts.

2. **Practice** should afford participants a chance to respond to a hypothetical situation quickly and on the spot. This may be accomplished through walk-through exercises, emergency response drills, or dramatic crisis simulations. Simulations of an active shooter, bullets being fired, or sounds of gunshots are not required and may not be necessary for effective learning. These types of dramatic crisis simulations should be utilized with extreme caution as they could create significant anxiety and trauma for participating staff (Frosch, 2014).

3. **Processing** should include review of the normal emotional responses staff may have experienced during the practice; demonstration of calming strategies to promote emotional regulation in the moment; time to discuss and discharge strong emotions; opportunity for staff to ask questions and raise concerns; and information about referral resources for professional behavioral health support in the community. The processing phase should be facilitated by a trained behavioral health professional who is not actively participating in the current training (i.e. not the school counselor who just went through the training).



Active shooter training should always be announced in advance. Accommodations for staff with physical or psychological disabilities that prohibit their ability to participate should be made as needed, and in accordance with the training options outlined in the regulation.



WHAT ARE THE KENTUCKY REQUIREMENTS FOR ACTIVE SHOOTER TRAINING?

Note: Active shooter training is required only for staff; students should not participate in active shooter training. Students prepare for active shooter emergencies through lockdown drills.

The School Safety and Resiliency Act (SSRA) requires a minimum of one hour of active shooter training for all school district employees each year. Active shooter training shall be

provided in person, by live streaming or via video recording and prepared by the Kentucky Department of Education in collaboration with the Kentucky Center for School Safety and the Kentucky Law Enforcement Council. Materials in an alternative format may be provided to employees hired after the annual training has occurred. These requirements are specified in [KRS 156.095\(7\)](#).

HOW SHOULD SCHOOLS DEVELOP AND IMPLEMENT TRAUMA-INFORMED ACTIVE SHOOTER DRILLS?

Active shooter training should be one part of a continuum of education and safety preparedness provided to school staff and developed, implemented and overseen by a school safety team. The school staff community includes both certified and classified staff working on campus. The safety team should have a multidisciplinary membership, including the school resource officer (SRO), the district school safety coordinator, a principal or assistant principal, a school counselor or other mental health professional, a teacher, and a classified staff person. Active shooter training and drills are the last element in the continuum of safety activities, and should occur only after staff have participated in other safety-focused training activities, including orientation to law enforcement and lockdown and shelter-in-place drills.

Each school's active shooter training will reflect the unique needs and circumstances of the school. School safety teams should consider the following when developing content and form of active shooter training:

- Developmental level of students

- School culture and climate
- Physical layout and geography of the campus including outdoor spaces, common areas and designated meeting points
- Historical and current school community exposure to trauma and/or gun violence
- Accommodations for students and staff with special needs
- Availability of behavioral health supports for staff following training

The school safety team should be sure to:

- Include representation and input from diverse staff (classified and certified, direct service, administrative and support) and from all areas of the school (student services, physical plant, food services, administration) in the planning and assessment of active shooter training.
- Carefully consider the balance of effective learning methods with the risk of traumatizing staff.
- Provide advanced notification to all staff, with clear explanation of training components and expectations.

- Inform local law enforcement of any active shooter drills to avoid confusion about it being an active emergency and align procedures and expectations.
- Ensure the availability of a trained behavioral health professional on site during the active shooter training.
- Ensure routine check-in with staff after the training and provide resources and referrals for all staff for follow up regarding any adverse effects of the training.
- Ensure staff who are not able to participate in the planned training activity are educated in another manner consistent with the regulation, and without fear of stigma or reprisal.

WHAT DOES THE RESEARCH SAY ABOUT ACTIVE SHOOTER TRAINING AND DRILLS?

Despite the ubiquity of active shooter training in schools nationwide, there is little empirical literature regarding active shooter training in public school settings. These trainings are grounded on concepts of stress inoculation and preparedness training in law enforcement and other non-school workplace settings, and assume active shooter training will improve preparedness and effective response of education staff as well. The research to date is inconclusive, leaving us unsure what is effective for school staff. Some evidence indicates that while most school staff receive active shooter training, their perceptions of its effectiveness is relatively low:

“Teachers want to believe they are capable of protecting their students and responding effectively to an active shooter

incident, but are unsure if they have adequate training to do so” (Rider, 2015, p.147). Teachers also have described being physically hurt and psychologically harmed by active shooter simulation drills (Herron, 2019; Rygg, 2015). Experts caution against overzealous approaches (Blad & Will, 2019) that may be appropriate for law enforcement, but are overwhelming for educators and school staff. The National Association of School Psychologists, National Association of School Resource Officers, and the U.S. Department of Education all strongly recommend adopting a trauma-informed approach to active shooter preparation in their guidance documents (see Resources section below) to mitigate potential unintended harm to teachers. Applying the 4 Rs provides a framework to guide a trauma-informed approach to active shooter drills:

ACTIVE SHOOTER TRAINING AND THE 4 RS

REALIZE	<i>Realize the need to balance strong preparedness and minimize potential for training elements to traumatize staff.</i>
RECOGNIZE	<i>Recognize signs of trauma in staff participants during or after active shooter training.</i>
RESPOND	<i>Respond to anxiety or traumatic stress responses of staff in real time.</i>
RESIST RE-TRAUMATIZATION	<i>Resist Re-traumatizing staff by recognizing the unique needs of the staff and school community, and providing space for processing.</i>

TIPS FOR TRAUMA-INFORMED ACTIVE SHOOTER TRAINING

The following are tips for planning, preparing, practicing and processing active shooter training:

Planning for Active Shooter Training:

- Compare various programs and options, and think carefully about the potential benefits and consequences (including possible traumatic effects) of each.
- Review all materials, including videos, prior to sharing with staff.
- Present information to staff in a group setting. With any adaptation of active shooter training components to virtual platforms be sure to minimize the potential for increased risk of trauma for individual learners who are isolated and may not have support available.
- Include classroom instruction, subject orientation and tabletop exercises prior to any practice drills to ensure participating staff are fully prepared.
- Consider use of simulated bullets or dramatized shooters carefully. There is no empirical evidence such simulations enhance learning or preparedness, and such simulations may raise anxiety and interfere with learning and problem-solving.
- Announce drills to staff in advance. Include alternative learning opportunities for staff who are unable to participate in training as planned, and ensure these staff will not suffer stigma or reprisal from peers or supervisors.
- Identify designated staff to observe participant reactions and provide support and assistance linking them to behavioral health resources.
- Plan accommodations for staff with special mobility or communication needs.
- Plan for additional or adaptations in training for staff working with students with special needs, particularly those with mobility or communication disabilities.
- Include outdoor areas, common spaces and potential meeting points in preparedness planning and training.
- Refrain from pairing active shooter training with other professional development in the same day. Staff will likely be distracted in anticipation of and following active shooter training, and thus will not benefit from other trainings.
- Clearly indicate this is a drill to distinguish a drill from an actual event.
- Include local law enforcement and other community partners in planning to ensure alignment of procedures and expectations.
- Inform law enforcement, community partners and media of practice exercises.

Preparation Component:

- Provide clear orientation to the training components and expectations.
- Include tabletop exercises or other case study exercises.
- Warn participants each time before discussing material that could be disturbing.
- Make sure participants understand the brain/ body response to perceived threat.
- Provide staff with a signal to use if they need to remove themselves from the training.
- Identify a “safe space” for staff to go if they need to remove themselves from the training activities.
- Provide support from a behavioral health professional (who is not participating in the training) for support staff who experience distress during the training.
- Ensure all staff complete preparation module before participating in practice module.

Practice Component:

- Explain process clearly and provide written description and reference as well.



- Remind participants this is a drill; refrain from surprise or unannounced simulations.
- Minimize use of highly realistic simulations of violence including bullets, dramatized shooters, etc.
- Remind participants of signal to indicate they need to remove themselves from the training exercise.
- Identify a “safe space” for staff to go if they need to remove themselves from the training activities.
- Make a behavioral health professional (who is not participating in the training) available to support staff who experience distress during the training.

Processing Component:

- Attendance at the processing module must be a required part of the training. Do not allow this section to be optional or only for those who “feel” they need it.
- Have a behavioral health professional not participating in the training co-lead the processing section.
- If possible, create small groups for this processing to facilitate a sense of safety.
- Provide information and education to participants about the range of responses they may experience; review the brain/body response to perceived threat; normalize a range of responses; remind participants some people experience a delayed response to stress.
- Teach, model and practice strategies to promote support staff with emotional regulation and calm the brain and body. These may include deep breathing, grounding exercises, mindful focusing, etc. (NCTSN, 2019)
- Allow participants to ask questions, raise concerns, share responses or remain quiet. Verbal participation is not required, even if attendance is required.
- Monitor participant responses for signs of serious anxiety, distress or traumatic stress reactions.
- Provide all participants with EAP, community behavioral health and crisis line resources for follow up as needed.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

- Kentucky Department of Education School Safety and Resiliency Act webpage: [https://education.ky.gov/school/sdfs/Pages/School-Safety-and-Resiliency-Act-\(Senate-Bill,-2019\).aspx](https://education.ky.gov/school/sdfs/Pages/School-Safety-and-Resiliency-Act-(Senate-Bill,-2019).aspx)
- Kentucky Center for School Safety: School Lockdown Planning Discussion Points
- U.S. Department of Homeland Security: Active Shooter Emergency Action Plan Video
- Explore Secure: How to Survive an Active Shooter or Terrorist Attack – Animation
- FEMA Emergency Management Institute: IS-907 Active Shooter: What You Can Do
- Kentucky Department of Criminal Justice Training: Active Shooter Training for Kentucky Educators
- Kentucky State Police Safe Schools Program: <https://kentuckystatepolice.org/safe-schools-program/#1510086276798-5bd02c29-bc3b>
- National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) and National Association of School Resource Officers (NASRO): Best Practice Considerations for Schools in Active Shooter and Other Armed Assailant Drills
- National Child Traumatic Stress Network (NCTSN): Creating School Active Shooter/ Intruder Drills and Self Care for Educators
- Readiness and Emergency Management for Schools (REMS) Technical Assistance Center: Active Shooter Situations: Describing Unique Challenges Involved in Preparing for, Responding to and Recovering from a School-Based or Postsecondary Institution Shooting

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